Polaris--Of the Snows

By CHARLES B. STILSON

"NORTH! North! To the north, Polaris. Tell the world—ah, tell them —boy— The north! The north! You must go, Polaris!"

Throwing the covers from his low couch, the old man arose and stood, a giant, tottering figure. Higher and higher he towered. He tossed his arms high, his features became convulsed; his eyes glazed. In his throat the rising tide of dissolution choked his voice to a hoarse rattle. He swayed.

With a last desperate rallying of his failing powers he extended his right arm and

Copyright 1915 by The Frank A. Munsey Company

This story appeared in The All-Story Cavalier for December 18, 1915

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Polaris hurled a spear and another brave Sardanian gave up the ghost

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pointed to the north. Then he fell, as a tree falls, quivered, and was still.

His companion bent over the pallet, and with light, sure fingers closed his eyes. In all the world he knew, Polaris never had seen a human being die. In all the world he now was utterly alone!

He sat down at the foot of the cot, and for many minutes gazed steadily at the wall with fixed, unseeing eyes. A sputtering little lamp, which stood on a table in the center of the room; flickered and went out. The flames of the fireplace played strange tricks in the strange room. In their uncertain glare, the features of the dead man seemed to writhe uncannily.

Garments and hangings of the skins of beasts stirred in the wavering shadows, as though the ghosts of their one-time tenants were struggling to reassert their dominion. At the one door and the lone window the wind whispered, fretted, and shrieked. Snow as fine and hard as the sands of the sea rasped across the panes. Somewhere without a dog howled—the long, throaty ululation of the wolf breed. Another joined in, and another, until a full score of canine voices wailed a weird requiem.

Unheeding, the living man sat as still as the dead.

Once, twice, thrice, a little clock struck a halting, uncertain stroke. When the fourth hour was passed it rattled crazily and stopped. The fire died away to embers; the embers paled to ashes. As though they were aware that something had gone awry, the dogs never ceased their baying. The wind rose higher and higher, and assailed the house with repeated shocks. Pale-gray and changeless day that lay across a sea of snows peered furtively through the windows.

At length the watcher relaxed his silent vigil. He arose, cast off his coat of white furs, stepped to the wall of the room opposite to the door, and shoved back a heavy wooden panel. A dark aperture was disclosed. He disappeared and came forth presently, carrying several large chunks of what appeared to be crumbling black rock.

He threw them on the dying fire, where they snapped briskly, caught fire, and flamed brightly. They were coal.

From a platform above the fireplace he dragged down a portion of the skinned carcass of a walrus. With the long, heavy-bladed knife from his belt he cut it into strips. Laden with the meat, he opened the door and went out into the dim day.

The house was set against the side of a cliff of solid, black, lusterless coal. A compact stockade of great boulders enclosed the front of the dwelling. From the back of the building, along the base of the cliff, ran a low shed of timber slabs, from which sounded the howling and worrying of the dogs.

As Polaris entered the stockade the clamor was redoubled. The rude plank at the front of the shed, which was its door, was shaken repeatedly as heavy bodies were hurled against it.

Kicking an accumulation of loose snow away from the door, the man took from its racks the bar which made it fast and let it drop forward. A reek of steam floated from its opening. A shaggy head was thrust forth, followed immediately by a great, gray body, which shot out as if propelled from a catapult.

Catching in its jaws the strip of flesh which the man dangled in front of the doorway, the brute dashed across the stockade and crouched against the wall, tearing at the meat. Dog after dog piled pell-mell through the doorway, until at least twenty-five grizzled animals were distributed about the enclosure, bolting their meal of walrus-flesh.

FOR a few moments the man sat on the roof of the shed and watched the animals. Although the raw flesh stiffened in the frigid air before even the jaws of the dogs could devour it and the wind cut like the lash of a whip, the man, coatless and with head and arms bared, seemed to mind neither the cold nor the blast.

He had not the ruggedness of figure or the great height of the man who lay dead within the house. He was of considerably more than medium height, but so broad of shoulder and deep of chest that he seemed short. Every line of his compact figure bespoke unusual strength—the wiry, swift strength of an animal.

His arms, white and shapely, rippled with muscles at the least movement of his fingers. His hands were small, but powerfully shaped. His neck was straight and not long. The thews spread from it to his wide shoulders like those of a splendid athlete. The ears were set close above the angle of a firm jaw, and were nearly hidden in a mass of tawny, yellow hair, as fine as a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

woman's which swept over his shoulders.

Above a square chin were full lips and a thin, aquiline nose. Deep, brown eyes, fringed with black lashes, made a marked contrast with the fairness of his complexion and his yellow hair and brows. He was not more than twenty-four years old.

Presently he re-entered the house. The dogs flocked after him to the door, whining and rubbing against his legs, but he allowed none of them to enter with him. He stood before the dead man and, for the first time in many hours, he spoke:

"For this day, my father, you have waited many years. I shall not delay. I will not fail you."

From a skin sack he filled the small lamp with oil and lighted its wick with a splinter of blazing coal. He set it where its feeble light shone on the face of the dead. Lifting the corpse, he composed its limbs and wrapped it in the great white pelt of a polar bear, tying it with many thongs. Before he hid from view the quiet features he stood back with folded arms and bowed head.

"I think he would have wished this," he whispered, and he sang softly that grand old hymn which has sped so many Christian soldiers from their battlefield. "Nearer, My God, to Thee," he sang in a subdued, melodious baritone. From a shelf of books which hung on the wall he reached a leather-covered volume. "It was his religion," he muttered; "It may be mine," and he read from the book: *"I am the resurrection and the life, whoso believeth in Me, even though he die—"* and on through the sonorous burial service.

He dropped the book within the folds of the bearskin, covered the dead face, and made fast the robe. Although the body was of great weight, he shouldered it without apparent effort, took the lamp in one hand, and passed through the panel in the wall.

Within the bowels of the cliff a large cavern had been hollowed in the coal. In a far corner a gray boulder had been hewn into the shape of a tombstone. On its face were carved side by side two words: "Anne" and "Stephen." At the foot of the stone were a mound and an open grave. He laid the body in the grave and covered it with earth and loose coal.

Again he paused, while the lamplight shone on the tomb.

"May you rest in peace, O Anne, my mother, and Stephen, my father. I never knew you, my mother, and, my father, I knew not who you were nor who I am. I go to carry your message."

HE ROLLED boulders onto the two mounds. The opening to the cave he walled up with other boulders, piling a heap of them and of large pieces of coal until it filled the low arch of the entrance.

In the cabin he made preparations for a journey.

One by one he threw on the fire books and other articles within the room, until little was left but skins and garments of fur and an assortment of barbaric weapons of the chase.

Last he dragged from under the cot a long, oaken chest.

Failing to find its key, he tore the lid from it with his strong hands.

Some articles of feminine wearing apparel which were within it he handled reverently, and at the same time curiously; for they were of cloth. Wonderingly he ran his fingers over silk and fine laces. Those he also burned.

From the bottom of the chest he took a short, brown rifle and a brace of heavy revolvers of a pattern and caliber famous in the annals of the plainsmen. With them were belt and holsters.

He counted the cartridges in the belt. Forty there were, and in the chambers of the revolvers and the magazine of the rifle, eighteen more. Fifty-eight shots with which to meet the perils that lay between himself and that world of men to the north—if, indeed, the passing years had not spoiled the ammunition.

He divested himself of his clothing, bathed with melted snow-water, and dressed himself anew in white furs. An omelet of eggs of wild birds and a cutlet of walrus-flesh sufficed to stay his hunger, and he was ready to face the unknown.

In the stockade was a strongly built sledge. Polaris packed it with quantities of meat both fresh and dried, of which there was a large store in the cabin. What he did not pack on the sledge he threw to the eager dogs.

He laid his harness out on the snow, cracked his long whip, and called up his team. "Octavius, Nero, Julius." Three powerful brutes bounded to him and took their places in the string. "Juno, Hector, Pallas." Three more grizzled snow-runners sprang

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

into line. "Marcus." The great, gray leader trotted sedately to the place at the head of the team. A seven-dog team it was, all of them bearing the names before which Rome and Greece had bowed.

Polaris added to the burden of the sledge the brown rifle, several spears, carved from oaken beams and tipped with steel, and a sealskin filled with boiled snow-water. On his last trip into the cabin he took from a drawer in the table a small, flat packet, sewn in membranous parchment.

"This is to tell the world my father's message and to tell who I am," he said, and hid it in an inner pocket of his vest of furs. He buckled on the revolver-belt, took whip and staff from the fireside, and drove his dog-team out of the stockade onto the prairie of snow, closing the gate on the howling chorus left behind.

He proceeded several hundred yards, then tethered his dogs with a word of admonition, and retraced his steps.

In the stockade he did a strange and terrible thing. Long used to seeing him depart from his team, the dogs had scattered and were mumbling their bones in various corners. "If I leave these behind me, they will perish miserably, or they will break out and follow, and I may not take them with me," he muttered.

From dog to dog he passed. To each he spoke a word of farewell. Each he caressed with a pat on the head. Each he killed with a single grip of his muscular hands, gripping them at the nape of the neck, where the bones parted in his powerful fingers. Silently and swiftly he proceeded until only one dog remained alive, old Paulus, the patriarch of the pack.

He bent over the animal, which raised its dim eyes to his and licked at his hands.

"Paulus, dear old friend that I have grown up with; farewell, Paulus," he said. He pressed his face against the noble head of the dog. When he raised it tears were coursing down his cheeks. Then Paulus's spirit sped.

Two by two he dragged the bodies into the cabin.

"Of old a great general in that far world of men burned his ships that he might not turn back. I will not turn back," he murmured. With a splinter of blazing coal he fired the house and the dog-shed. He tore the gate of the stockade from its hinges and cast it into the ruins. With his great strength he toppled over the capping-stones of the wall, and left it a ruin also.

Then he rejoined the dog-team, set his back to the south pole, and began his journey.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST WOMAN

PROBABLY in all the world there was not the equal of the team of dogs which Polaris had selected for his journey. Their ancestors in the long ago had been the fierce, gray timberwolves of the north. Carefully cross-bred, the strains in their blood were of the wolf, the great Dane, and the mastiff; but the wolf strain held dominant. They had the loyalty of the mastiff, the strength of the great Dane, and the tireless sinews of the wolf. From the environment of their rearing they were well furred and inured to the cold and hardships of the Antarctic. They would travel far.

Polaris did not ride on the sledge. He ran with the dogs, as swift and tireless as they. A wonderful example of the adaptibility to conditions of the human race, his upbringing had given him the strength and endurance of an animal. He had never seen the dog that he could not run down.

He, too, would travel fast and far.

In the nature of the land through which they journeyed on their first dash to the northward, there were few obstacles to quick progress. It was a prairie of snow, wind-swept, and stretching like a desert as far as eye could discern. Occasionally were upcroppings of coal cliffs similar to the one where had been Polaris's home. On the first drive they made a good fifty miles.

Need of sleep, more than fatigue, warned both man and beasts of camping-time. Polaris, who seemed to have a definite point in view, urged on the dogs for an hour longer than was usual on an ordinary trip, and they came to the border of the immense snow-plain.

To the northeast lay a ridge of what appeared to be snow-covered hills. Beyond the edge of the white prairie was a forest of ice. Millions of jagged monoliths stood and lay, jammed closely together, in every conceivable shape and angle.

At some time a giant ice-flow had crashed down upon the land. It had fretted and torn at the shore, had heaved itself up,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with its myriad gleaming tusks bared for destruction. Then nature had laid upon it a calm, white hand, and had frozen it quiet and still and changeless.

Away to the east a path was open, which skirted the field of broken ice and led in toward the base of the hills.

Polaris did not take that path. He turned west, following the line of the ice-belt. Presently he found what he sought. A narrow lane led into the heart of the icebergs.

At the end of it, caught in the jaws of two giant bergs, hung fast, as it had hung for years, the sorry wreck of a stout ship. Scarred and rent by the grinding of its prison-ice, and weather-beaten by the rasping of wind-driven snow in a land where the snow never melts, still on the square stern of the vessel could be read the dimming letters which spelled "Yedda."

Polaris unharnessed the pack, and man and dogs crept on board the hulk. It was but a timber shell. Much of the decking had been cut away, and everything movable had been taken from it for the building of the cabin and the shed, now in black ruins fifty miles to the south.

In an angle of the ice-wall, a few yards from the ship, Polaris pitched his camp and built a fire with timbers from the wreck. He struck his flame with a rudely fashioned tinder-box, catching the spark in fine scrapings of wood and nursing it with his breath. He fed the dogs and toasted meat for his own meal at the fire. With a large robe from the sledge he bedded the team snugly beside the fire.

With his own parka of furs he clambered aboard the ship, found a bunk in the forecastle, and curled up for the night.

Several hours later hideous clamor broke his dreamless slumber. He started from the bunk and leaped from the ship's side into the ice-lane. Every dog of the pack was bristling and snarling with rage. Mixed with their uproar was a deeper, hoarser note of anger that came from the throat of no dog—a note which the man knew well.

The team was bunched a few feet ahead of the fire as Polaris came over the rail of the ship. Almost shoulder to shoulder the seven crouched, every head pointed up the path. They were quivering from head to tail with anger, and seemed to be about to charge.

Whipping the dogs back, the son of the snows ran forward to meet the danger alone. He could afford to lose no dogs. He had forgotten the guns, but he bore weapons with which he was better acquainted.

With a long-hafted spear in his hand and the knife loosened in his belt he bounded up the pathway and stood, wary but unafraid, fronting an immense white bear.

He was not a moment too soon. The huge animal had set himself for the charge, and in another instant would have hurled its enormous weight down on the dogs. The beast hesitated, confronted by this new enemy, and sat back on its haunches to consider.

Knowing his foe aforetime, Polaris took that opportunity to deliver his own charge. He bounded forward and drove his tough spear with all his strength into the white chest below the throat. Balanced as it was on its haunches, the shock of the man's onset upset the bear, and it rolled backward, a jet of blood spurting over its shaggy coat and dyeing the snow.

Like a flash the man followed his advantage. Before the brute could turn or recover Polaris reached its back and drove his long-bladed knife under the left shoulder. Twice he struck deep, and sprang aside. The battle was finished.

The beast made a last mighty effort to rear erect, tearing at the spear-shaft, and went down under an avalanche of snarling, ferocious dogs. For the team could refrain from conflict no longer, and charged like a flying wedge to worry the dying foe.

Replenishing his store of meat with strips from the newly slain bear, Polaris allowed the pack to make a famous meal on the carcass. When they were ready to take the trail again, he fired the ship with a blazing brand, and they trotted forth along the snow-path to the east with the skeleton of the stout old Yedda roaring and flaming behind them.

FOR days Polaris pressed northward. To his right extended the range of the white hills. To the left was the seemingly endless ice-field that looked like the angry billows of a storm-tossed sea which had been arrested at the height of tempest, its white-capped, upthrown waves paralyzed cold and dead.

Down the shore-line, where his path lay, a fierce wind blew continuously and with increasing rigor. He was puzzled to find that instead of becoming warmer as he pro-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gressed to the north and away from the pole, the air was more frigid than it had been in his homeland. Hardy as he was, there were times when the furious blasts chilled him to the bone and when his magnificent dogs flinched and whimpered.

Still he pushed on. The sledge grew lighter as the provisions were consumed, and there were few marches that did not cover forty miles. Polaris slept with the dogs, huddled in robes. The very food they ate they must warm with the heat of their bodies before it could be devoured. There was no vestige of anything to make fuel for a camp-fire.

He had covered some hundreds of miles when he found the contour of the country was changing. The chain of the hills swung sharply away to the east, and the path broadened, fanwise, east and west. An undulating plain of snow and ice-caps, rent by many fissures, lay ahead.

This was the most difficult traveling of all.

In the middle of their second march across the plain, the man noticed that his gray snow-coursers were uneasy. They threw their snouts up to the wind and growled angrily, scenting some unseen danger. Although he had seen nothing larger than a fox since he entered the plain, bear signs had been frequent, and Polaris welcomed a hunt to replenish his larder.

He halted the team and outspanned the dogs so they would be unhampered by the sledge in case of attack. Bidding them remain behind, he went to reconnoiter.

He clambered to the summit of a snow-covered ice-crest and gazed ahead. A great joy welled into his heart, a thanksgiving so keen that it brought a mist to his eyes.

He had found man!

Not a quarter of a mile ahead of him, standing in the lee of a low ridge, were two figures unmistakably human. At the instant he saw them the wind brought to his nostrils, sensitive as those of an animal, a strange scent that set his pulses bounding. He *smelled* man and man's fire! A thin spiral of smoke was curling over the back of the ridge. He hurried forward.

Hidden by the undulations of slopes and drifts he approached within a few feet of them without being discovered. On the point of crying aloud to them he stopped, paralyzed, and crouched behind a drift. For these men to whom his heart called madly—the first of his own kind—but one whom he had ever seen—were tearing at each other's throats like maddened beasts in an effort to take life!

Like a man in a dream, Polaris heard their voices raised in curses. They struggled fiercely but weakly. They were on the brink of one of the deep fissures, or crevasses, which seamed this strange, forgotten land. Each was striving to push the other into the chasm.

Then one who seemed the stronger wrenched himself free and struck the other in the face. The stricken man staggered, threw his arms above his head, toppled, and crashed down the precipice.

Polaris's first introduction to the civilization which he sought was murder! For those were civilized white men who had fought. They wore garments of cloth. Revolvers hung from their belts. Their speech, of which he had heard little but cursing, was civilized English.

Pale to the lips, the son of the wilderness leaped over the snow-drift and strode toward the survivor. In the teachings of his father, murder was the greatest of all crimes; its punishment was swift death. This man who stood on the brink of the chasm which had swallowed his companion had been the aggressor in the fight. He had struck first. He had killed. In the heart of Polaris arose a terrible sense of outraged justice. This waif of the eternal snows became the law.

The stranger turned and saw him. He started violently, paled, and then an angry flush mounted to his temples and an angry glint came into his eyes. His crime had been witnessed, and by a strange white man.

His hand flew to his hip, and he swung a heavy revolver up and fired, speeding the bullet with a curse. He missed and would have fired again, but his hour had struck. With the precision of an automaton Polaris snatched one of his own pistols from the holster. He raised it above the level of his shoulder, and fired on the drop.

Not for nothing had he spent long hours practicing with his father's guns, sighting and pulling the trigger countless times, although they were empty. The man in front of him staggered, dropped his pistol, and reeled dizzily. A stream of blood gushed from his lips. He choked, clawed at the air, and pitched backward.

The chasm which had received his victim, received the murderer also.

Polaris heard a shrill scream to his right,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHAPTER III

POLARIS MAKES A PROMISE

BOTH stood transfixed for a long moment—the man with the wonder that followed his anger, the woman with horror. Polaris drew a deep breath and stepped a hesitating pace forward.

The woman threw out her hands in a gesture of loathing.

"Murderer!" she said in a low, deep voice, choked with grief. "Oh, my brother; my poor brother!" She threw herself on the snow, sobbing terribly.

Rooted to the spot by her repelling gesture, Polaris watched her. So one of the men had been her brother. Which one? His naturally clear mind began to reassert itself.

They took the snow-path to the east, with the skeleton of the Yedda flaming behind them

and turned swiftly on his heel, automatically swinging up his revolver to meet a new peril.

Another being stood on the brow of the ridge—stood with clasped hands and horror-stricken eyes. Clad almost the same as the others, there was yet a subtle difference which garments could not disguise.

Polaris leaned forward with his whole soul in his eyes. His hand fell to his side. He had made his second discovery. He had discovered woman!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Lady," he called softly. He did not attempt to go nearer to her.

She raised her face from her arms, crept to her knees, and stared at him stonily. "Well, murderer, finish your work," she said. "I am ready. Ah, what had he—what had they done that you should take their lives?"

"Listen to me, lady," said Polaris quietly. "You saw me—kill. Was that man your brother?"

The girl did not answer, but continued to gaze at him with horror-stricken eyes. Her mouth quivered pitifully.

"If that man was your brother, then I killed him, and with reason," pursued Polaris calmly. "If he was not, then of your brother's death, at least, I am guiltless. I did but punish his slayer."

"His *slayer!* What are you saying?" gasped the girl.

Polaris snapped open the breech of his revolver and emptied its cartridges into his hand. He took the other revolver from its holster and emptied it also. He laid the cartridge in his hand and extended it.

"See," he said, "there are twelve cartridges, but only one empty shell. Only two shots were fired—one by the man whom I killed, the other by me." He saw that he had her attention, and repeated his question: "Was that man your brother?"

"No," she answered.

"Then, you see, I could not have *shot* your brother," said Polaris. His face grew stern with the memory of the scene he had witnessed. "They quarreled, your brother and the other man. I came behind the drift yonder and saw them. I might have stopped them—but, lady, they were the first men I had ever seen, save only one. I was bound by surprise. The other man was the stronger. He struck your brother into the crevasse. He would have shot me, but my mind returned to me, and with anger at that which I saw, and I killed him.

"In proof, lady, see—the snow between me and the spot yonder where they stood is untracked. I have been no nearer."

Wonderingly the girl followed with her eyes and the direction of his pointing finger. She comprehended.

"I—I believe you have told me the truth," she faltered. "They *had* quarreled. But—but—you said they were the first men you had ever seen. How—what—"

Polaris crossed the intervening slope and stood at her side.

"That is a long tale, lady," he said simply. "You are in distress. I would help you. Let us go to your camp. Come."

The girl raised her eyes to his, and they gazed long at one another. Polaris saw a slender figure of nearly his own height. She was clad in heavy woolen garments. A hooded cap framed the long oval of her face.

The eyes that looked into his were steady and gray. Long eyes they were, delicately turned at the corners. Her nose was straight and high, its end titlted ever so slightly. Full, crimson lips and a firm little chin peeped over the collar of her jacket. A wisp of chestnut hair swept her high brow and added its tale to a face that would have been accounted beautiful in any land.

In the eyes of Polaris she was divinity.

The girl saw a young giant in the flower of his manhood. Clad in splendid white furs of fox and bear, with a necklace of teeth of the polar bear for adornment, he resembled those magnificent barbarians of the Northland's ancient sagas.

His yellow hair had grown long, and fel about his shoulders under his fox-skin cap. The clean-cut lines of his face scarce were shaded by its growth of red-gold beard an mustache. Except for the guns at his bel he might have been a young chief of vikings His countenance was at once eager, thoughtful, and determined.

Barbaric and strange as he seemed, the girl found in his face that which she might trust. She removed a mitten and extended a small, white hand to him. Falling on one knee in the snow, Polaris kissed it, with the grace of a knight of old doing homage to his lady fair.

The girl flashed him another wondering glance from her long, gray eyes that set all his senses tingling. Side by side they passed over the ridge.

Disaster had overtaken the camp which lay on the other side. Camp it was by courtesy only—a miserable shelter of blankets and robes, propped with pieces of broken sledge, a few utensils, the partially devoured carcass of a small seal, and a tiny fire, kindled from fragments of the sledge. In the snow some distance from the fire lay the stiffened bodies of several sledge dogs, sinister evidence of the hopelessness of the campers' position.

Polaris turned questioningly to the girl.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We were lost in the storm," she said. "We left the ship, meaning to be gone only a few hours, and then were lost in the blinding snow. That was three days ago. How many miles we wandered I do not know. The dogs became crazed and turned upon us. The men shot them. Oh, there seems so little hope in this terrible land!" She shuddered. "But you—where did you come from?"

"Do not lose heart, lady," replied Polaris. "Always, in every land, there is hope. There must be. I have lived here all my life. I have come up from the far south. I know but one path—the path to the north, to the world of men. Now I will fetch my sledge up, and then we shall talk and decide. We will find your ship. I, Polaris, promise you that."

He turned from her to the fire, and cast on its dying embers more fragments of the splintered sledge. His eyes shone. He muttered to himself: "A ship, a ship! Ah, but my father's God is good to his son!"

He set off across the snow slopes to bring up the pack.

CHAPTER IV

HURLED SOUTH AGAIN

WHEN his strong form had bounded from her view, the girl turned to the little hut and shut herself within. She cast herself on a heap of blankets, and gave way to her bereavement and terror.

Her brother's corpse was scarcely cold at the bottom of the abyss. She was lost in the trackless wastes—alone, save for this bizarre stranger who had come out of the snows, this man of strange sayings, who seemed a demigod of the wilderness.

Could she trust him? She must. She recalled him kneeling in the snow, and the courtierlike grace with which he kissed her hand. A hot flush mounted to her eyes. She dried her tears.

She heard him return to the camp, and heard the barking of the dogs. Once he passed near the hut, but he did not intrude, and she remained within.

Womanlike, she set about the rearrangement of her hair and clothing. When she had finished she crept to the doorway and peeped out. Again her blushes burned her cheeks. She saw the son of the snows crouched above the camp-fire, surrounded by a group of monstrous dogs. He had rubbed his face with oil. A bright blade glittered in his hand. Polaris was *shaving!*

Presently she went out. The young man sprang to his feet, cracking his long whip to restrain the dogs, which would have sprung upon the stranger. They huddled away, their teeth bared, staring at her with glowing eyes. Polaris seized one of them by the scruff of the neck, lifted it bodily from the snow, and swung it in front of the girl.

"Talk to him, lady," he said; "you must be friends. This is Julius."

The girl bent over and fearlessly stroked the brute's head.

"Julius, good dog," she said. At her touch the dog quivered and its hackles rose. Under the caress of her hand it quieted gradually. The bristling hair relaxed, and Julius's tail swung slowly to and fro in an overture of amity. When Polaris loosed him, he sniffed in friendly fashion at the girl's hands, and pushed his great head forward for more caresses.

Then Marcus, the grim leader of the pack, stalked majestically forward for his introduction.

"Ah, you have won Marcus!" cried Polaris. "And Marcus won is a friend indeed. None of them would harm you now." Soon she had learned the name and had the confidence of every dog of the pack, to the great delight of their master.

Among the effects in the camp was a small oil-stove, which Polaris greeted with brightened eyes. "One like that we had, but it was worn out long ago," he said. He lighted the stove and began the preparation of a meal.

She found that he had cleared the camp and put all in order. He had dragged the carcasses of the dead dogs to the other side of the slope and piled them there. His stock of meat was low, and his own dogs would have no qualms if it came to making their own meals off these strangers of their own kind.

The girl produced from the remnants of the camp stores a few handfuls of coffee and an urn. Polaris watched in wonderment as she brewed it over the tiny stove and his nose twitched in reception of its delicious aroma. They drank the steaming beverage, piping hot, from tin cups. In the stinging air of the snowlands even the keenest grief must give way to the pangs of hunger. The girl ate heartily of a meal that

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in a more moderate climate she would have considered fit only for beasts.

When their supper was completed they sat huddled in their furs at the edge of the fire. Around them were crouched the dogs, watching with eager eyes for any scraps which might fall to their share.

"Now tell me who you are, and how you came here," questioned the girl.

"Lady, my name is Polaris, and I think that I am an American gentleman," he said, and a trace of pride crept into the words of the answer. "I came here from a cabin and a ship that lie burned many leagues to the southward. All my life I have lived there, with but one companion, my father, who now is dead, and who sends me to the north with a message to that world of men that lies beyond the snows, and from which he long was absent."

"A ship—a cabin—" The girl bent toward him in amazement. "And burned? And you have lived—have grown up in this land of snow and ice and bitter cold, where but few things can exist—I don't understand!"

"My father has told me much, but not all. It is all in his message which I have not seen," Polaris answered. "But that which I tell you is truth. He was a seeker after new things. He came here to seek that which no other man had found. He came in a ship with my mother and others. All were dead before I came to knowledge. He had built a cabin from the ruins of the ship, and he lived there until he died."

"And you say that you are an American gentleman?"

"That he told me, lady, although I do not know my name or his, except that he was Stephen, and he called me Polaris."

"And did he never try to get to the north?" asked the girl.

"No. Many years ago, when I was a boy, he fell and was hurt. After that he could do but little. He could not travel."

"And you?"

"I learned to seek food in the wilderness, lady; to battle with its beasts, to wrest that which would sustain our lives from the snows and the wastes."

Much more of his life and of his father he told her under her wondering questioning—a tale most incredible to her ears, but, as he said, the truth. Finally he finished.

"Now, lady, what of you?" he asked. "How came you here, and from where?"

"My name is Rose—"

"Ah, that is the name of a flower," said Polaris. "You were well named."

He did not look at her as he spoke. His eyes were turned to the snow slopes and were very wistful. "I have never seen a flower," he continued slowly, "but my father said that of all created things they were the fairest."

"I have another name," said the girl. "It is Rose—Rose Emer."

"And why did you come here, Rose Emer?" asked Polaris.

"Like your father, I—we were seekers after new things, my brother and I. Both our father and mother died, and left my brother John and myself ridiculously rich. We had to use our money, so we traveled. We have been over most of the world. Then a man—an American gentleman—a very brave man, organized an expedition to come to the south to discover the south pole. My brother and I knew him. We were very much interested in his adventure. We helped him with it. Then John insisted that he would come with the expedition, and—oh, they didn't wish me to come, but I never had been left behind—I came, too."

"And that brave man who came to seek the pole, where is he now?"

"Perhaps he is dead—out there," said the girl, with a catch in her voice. She pointed to the south. "He left the ship and went on, days ago. He was to establish two camps with supplies. He carried an airship with him. He was to make his last dash for the pole through the air from the farther camp. His men were to wait for him until—until they were sure that he would not come back."

"An airship!" Polaris bent forward with sparkling eyes. "Se there *are* airships, then! Ah, this man must be brave! How is he called?"

"James Scoland is his name—Captain Scoland."

"He went on whence I came? Did he go by that way?" Polaris pointed where the white tops of the mountain range which he skirted pierced the sky.

"No. He took a course to the east of the mountains, where other explorers of years before had been before him."

"Yes, I have seen maps. Can you tell me where, or nearly where, we are now?" he asked the girl.

"This is Victoria Land," she answered. "We left the ship in a long bay, extending

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in from Ross Sea, near where the 160th meridian joins the 80th parallel. We are somewhere within three days' journey from the ship."

"And so near to open water?"

She nodded.

ROSE EMER slept in the little shelter, with the grim Marcus curled on a robe beside her pallet. Crouched among the dogs in the camp, Polaris slept little. For hours he sat huddled, with his chin on his hands, pondering what the girl had told him. Another man was on his way to the pole—a very brave man—and he might reach it. And then—Polaris must be very wary when he met that man who had won so great a prize.

"Ah, my father," he sighed, "learning is mine through patience. History of the world and of its wars and triumphs and failures, I know. Of its tongues you have taught me, even those of the Roman and the Greek, long since passed away; but how little do I know of the ways of men—and of women! I shall be very careful, my father."

Quite beyond any power of his to control, an antagonism was growing within him for that man whom he had not seen; antagonism that was not all due to the magnitude of the prize which the man might be winning, or might be dying for. Indeed, had he been able to analyze it, that was the least part of it.

When they broke camp for their start they found that the perverse wind, which had rested while they slept, had risen when they would journey, and hissed bitterly across the bleak steppes of snow. Polaris made a place on the sledge for the girl, and urged the pack into the teeth of the gale. All day long they battled ahead in it, bearing left to the west, where was more level pathway, than among the snow dunes.

In an ever increasing blast they came in sight of open water. They halted on a far-stretching field, much broken by huge masses, so snow-covered that it was not possible to know whether they were of rock or ice. Not a quarter of a mile beyond them, the edge of the field was fretted by wind-lashed waves, which extended away to the horizon rim, dotted with tossing icebergs of great height.

Polaris pitched camp in the shelter of a towering cliff, and they made themselves what comfort they could in the stinging cold.

They had slept several hours when the slumbers of Polaris were pierced by a woman's screams, the frenzied howling of the dogs, and the thundering reverberations of grinding and crashing ice cliffs. A dash of spray splashed across his face.

He sprang to his feet in the midst of the leaping pack; as he did so he felt the field beneath him sway and pitch like a hammock. For the first time since he started for the north the Antarctic sun was shining brightly—shining cold and clear on a great disaster!

For they had pitched their camp on an ice floe. Whipped on by the gale, the sea had risen under it, heaved it up and broken it. On a section of the floe several acres in extent their little camp lay, at the very brink of a gash in the ice-field which had cut them off from the land over which they had come.

The water was raging like a millrace through the widening rift between them and the shore. Caught in a swift current and urged by the furious wind, the broken-up floe was drifting, faster and faster—*back to the south!*

CHAPTER V

BATTLE ON THE FLOE

HELPLESS, Polaris stood at the brink of the rift, swirling water and tossing ice throwing the spray about him in clouds. Here was opposition against which his naked strength was useless. As if they realized that they were being parted from the firm land, the dogs grouped at the edge of the floe and sent their dismal howls across the raging swirl, only to be drowned by the din of the crashing icebergs.

Turning, Polaris saw Rose Emer. She stood at the doorway of the tent of skins, staring across the wind-swept channel with a blank despair looking from her eyes.

"Ah, all is lost, now!" she gasped.

Then the great spirit of the man rose into spoken words. "No, lady," he called, his voice rising clearly above the shrieking and thundering pandemonium. "We yet have our lives."

As he spoke there was a rending sound at his feet. The dogs sprang back in terror and huddled against the face of the ice cliff. Torn away by the impact of some weightier body beneath, nearly half of the ledge where

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they stood was split from the main body of the floe, and plunged, heaving and crackling into the current.

Polaris saved himself by a mighty spring. Right in the path of the gash lay the sledge, and it hung balanced at the edge of the ice floe. Down it swung, and would have slipped over, but Polaris saw it going.

He clutched at the ends of the leathern dog-harness as they glided from him across the ice and, with a tug, into which he put all the power of his splendid muscles, he retrieved the sledge. Hardly had he dragged it to safety when, with another roar of sundered ice, their foothold gaped again and left them but a scanty shelf at the foot of the beetling berg.

"Here we may not stay, lady," said Polaris. He swept the tent and its robes into his arms and piled them on the sledge. Without waiting to harness the dogs, he grasped the leather bands and alone pulled the load along the ledge and around a shoulder of the cliff.

At the other side of the cliff a ridge extended between the berg which they skirted and another towering mountain of ice of similar formation. Beyond the twin bergs lay the level plane of the floe, its edges continually frayed by the attack of the waves and the onset of floating ice.

Along the incline of the ridge were several hollows partially filled with drift snow. Knowing that on the ice cape, in such a tempest, they must soon perish miserably, Polaris made camp in one of these depressions where the deep snow tempered the chill of its foundation.

In the clutch of the churning waters the floe turned slowly like an immense wheel as it drifted in the current. Its course was away from the shore to the southwest, and it gathered speed and momentum with every passing second. The cove from whence it had been torn was already a mere notch in the faraway shore line.

Around them was a scene of wild and compelling beauty. Leagues and leagues of on-rushing water hurled its white-crested squadrons against the precipitous sides of the flotilla of icebergs, tore at the edges of the drifting floes, and threw itself in huge waves across the more level planes, inundating them repeatedly. Clouds of lacelike spray hung in the air after each attack, and cascading torrents returned to the waves.

Above it all the antarctic sun shone gloriously, splintering its golden spears on the myriad pinnacles, minarets, battlements, and crags of towering masses of crystal that reflected back into the quivering air all the colors of the spectrum. Thinner crests blazed flame-red in the rays. Other points glittered coldly blue. From a thousand lesser scintillating spires the shifting play of the colors, from vermilion to purple, from green to gold, in the lavish magnificence of nature's magic, was torture to the eye that beheld.

On the spine of the ridge stood Polaris, leaning on his long spear and gazing with heightened color and gleaming eyes on those fairy symbols of old mother nature. To the girl who watched him he seemed to complete the picture. In his superb trappings of furs, and surrounded by his shaggy servants, he was at one with his weird and terrible surroundings. She admired—and shuddered.

Presently, when he came down from the ridge, she asked him, with a brave smile, "What, sir, will be the next move?"

"That is, in the hands of the great God, if such a one there be," he said. "Whatever it may be, it shall find us ready. Somewhere we must come to shore. When we do —on to the north and the ship, be it half a world away."

"But for food and warmth? We must have those, if we are to go in the flesh."

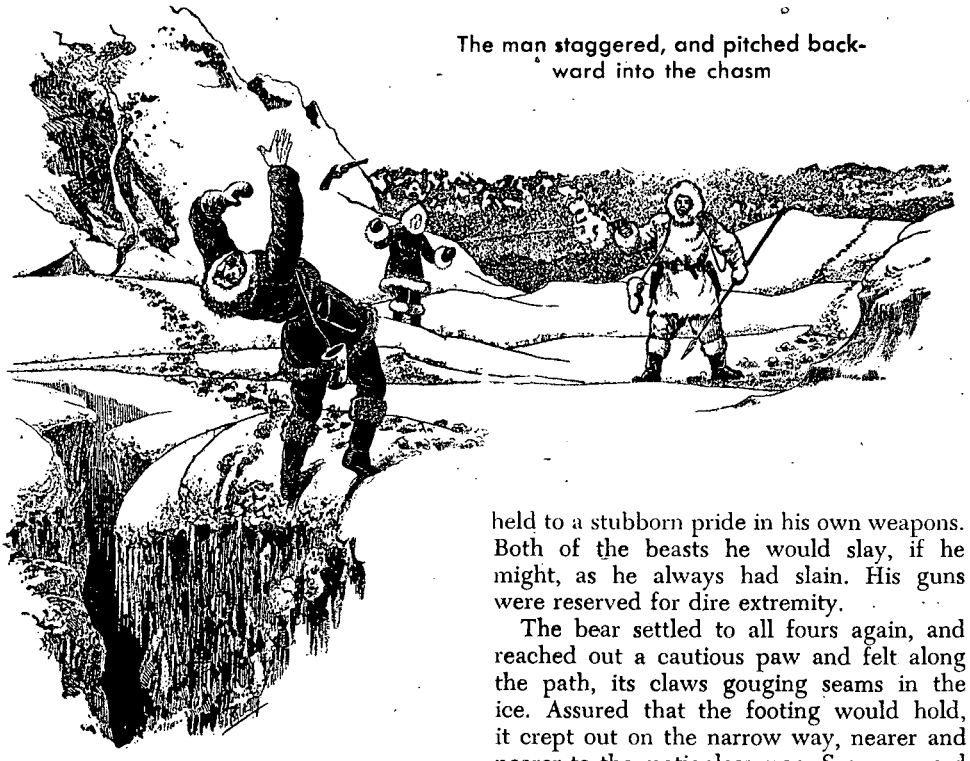
"Already they are provided for," he replied quickly. He was peering sharply over her shoulder toward the mass of the other berg. With his words the clustered pack set up an angry snarling and baying. She followed his glance and paled.

Lumbering forth from a narrow pass at the extremity of the ridge was a gigantic polar bear. His little eyes glittered wickedly, hungrily, and his long, red tongue crept out and licked his slavering chops. As he came on, with ungainly, padding gait, his head swung ponderously to and fro.

Scarcely had he cleared the pass of his immense bulk when another twitching white muzzle was protruded, and a second beast, in size nearly equal to the first, set foot on the ridge and ambled on to the attack.

Reckless at least of this peril, the dogs would have leaped forward to close with the invaders but their master intervened. The stinging, cracking lash in his hand drove them from the foe. Their overlord, man, elected to make the battle alone.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



The man staggered, and pitched backward into the chasm

In two springs he reached the sledge, tore the rifle from its coverings, and was at the side of the girl. He thrust the weapon into her hands.

"Back, lady; back to the sledge!" he cried. "Unless I call, shoot not. If you do shoot, aim for the throat when they rear, and leave the rest to me and the dogs. Many times have I met these enemies, and I know well how to deal with them."

With another crack of the whip over the heads of the snarling pack, he left her and bounded forward, spear in hand and long knife bared.

Awkward of pace and unhurried, the snow kings came on to their feast. In a thought the man chose his ground. Between him and the bears the ridge narrowed so that for a few feet there was footway for but one of the monsters at once.

Polaris ran to where that narrow path began and threw himself on his face on the ice.

At that ruse the foremost bear hesitated. He reared and brushed his muzzle with his formidable crescent-clawed paw. Polaris might have shot then and ended at once the hardest part of his battle. But the man held to a stubborn pride in his own weapons. Both of the beasts he would slay, if he might, as he always had slain. His guns were reserved for dire extremity.

The bear settled to all fours again, and reached out a cautious paw and felt along the path, its claws gouging seams in the ice. Assured that the footing would hold, it crept out on the narrow way, nearer and nearer to the motionless man. Scarce a yard from him it squatted. The steam of its breath beat toward him.

It raised one armed paw to strike. The girl cried out in terror and raised the rifle. The man moved, and she hesitated.

Down came the terrible paw, its curved claws projected and compressed for the blow. It struck only the adamantine ice of the pathway, splintering it. With the down stroke timed to the second, the man had leaped up and forward.

As though set on a steel spring, he vaulted into the air, above the clashing talons and gnashing jaws, and landed light and sure on the back of his ponderous adversary. To pass an arm under the bear's throat, to clip its back with the grip of his legs was the work of a heart-beat's time for Polaris.

With a stifled howl of rage the bear rose to its haunches, and the man rose with it. He gave it no time to turn or settle. Exerting his muscles of steel, he tugged the huge head back. He swung clear from the body of his foe. His feet touched the path and held it. He shot one knee into the back of the bear.

The spear he had dropped when he sprang, but his long knife gleamed in his

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hand, and he stabbed, once, twice, sending the blade home under the brute's shoulder. He realeased his grip, spurned the yielding body with his foot, and the huge hulk rolled from the path down the slope, crimsoning the snow with its blood.

Polaris bounded across the narrow ledge and regained his spear. He smiled as there arose from the foot of the slope a hideous clamor that told him that the pack had charged in, as usual, not to be restrained at sight of the kill. He waved his hand to the girl, who stood, statuelike, beside the sledge.

Doubly enraged at its inability to participate in the battle which had been the death of its mate, the smaller bear waited no longer when the path was clear, but rushed madly with lowered head. Strong as he was, the man knew that he could not hope to stay or turn that avalanche of flesh and sinew. As it reached him he sprang aside where the path broadened, lashing out with his keen-edged spear.

His aim was true. Just over one of the small eyes the point of the spear bit deep, and blood followed it. With tigerish agility the man leaped over the beast, striking down as he did so.

The bear reared on its hindquarters and whimpered, brushing at its eyes with its forepaws. Its head gashed so that the flowing blood blinded it, it was beaten. Before it stood its master. Bending back until his body arched like a drawn bow, Polaris poised his spear and thrust home at the broad chest.

A death howl that was echoed back from the crashing cliffs was answer to his stroke. The bear settled forward and sprawled in the snow.

Polaris set his foot on the body of the fallen monster and gazed down at the girl with smiling face.

"Here, lady, are food and warmth for many days," he called.

CHAPTER VI

INTO THE UNKNOWN

SOUTHWARD, ever southward, the floating glory of the jeweled tide bore them. Fast as they went, the wind-urged waters raced by them faster still. Steel-blue surges, mountain high, tore by their refuge in endless rush. From a sky gale-swept of all clouds, the sun shone steadily through nightless days.

Fragment after fragment of the drifting floe was rasped away and ground to splinters among the staggering icebergs. As it dwindled in dimensions, its revolving movement increased, until it reeled onward like a giant gyroscope, and they who rode it grew giddy with its whirl.

Around them nature played her heart-shaking music, and spread over glittering tide and snow-splashed icebergs the wondrous, iridescent filaments reflected from the facets of her monstrous gems.

Then, as suddenly as it had risen, the wind died away. Cloudheads arose and overcast the sky, the ragged waves smoothed into long rollers, and their frightful pace was abated, although they continued to ride south with a strong tide.

A few hours later it seemed that the wind had been to the end of the world and had turned to hurry northward again, for it began to beat up steadily from ahead of them, but not strongly enough to overcome the tide it had set with it in its headlong dash.

To their left, far away, they could catch occasional glimpses of a jagged coast-line. Out to the right little was to be seen but the tossing flotilla of bergs, gradually fretting away into tide ice.

With the return of the wind from the south, Polaris was puzzled to note once more the recurrence of a phenomenon over which he had pondered often. The air was growing warmer!

Another manifestation came; more puzzling by far than that of the warming breeze. One day they awoke and found the air filled with drifting white particles. As far as the eye could see it seemed that a shower of fine snow was falling. But the storm was not of snow!

Settling weblike in the crannies of the ice, filming the crests of the waves, hanging impalpably in the breeze, it was ashes that was falling!

Whence came this strangest of all storms? Polaris and Rose Emer stared at each other, completely at a loss.

"If we are to go far enough, we are to find out some great new thing, lady," said the man.

SOON after the battle with the bears they had abandoned the first iceberg. The floe had broken away on that side until the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

berg's sheer side was opposed to the fury of the wind and waves, and Polaris feared that it would topple under the constant impact with other bergs, and pitch them into the tide.

They crossed the narrow path to the twin berg, threaded the pass of the bears, and found on the farther side a cavern in the ice, partly filled with drift snow, where the animals had made their lair. There they were now confined, as in a castle. The plane of the floe had all been beaten away. Even the ridge between the bergs was gone, and the waves rolled between the twin towers of ice, still held together beneath the surface of the waters by a bond that no crash had severed.

The wind subsided, but the air remained warm. No longer were they within the realm of eternal ice, for, outside their prison, the surfaces of the revolving bergs at times actually dripped. The ice was thawing!

Then a kink in the current caught them and shot them straight to shore. From the crest of their watchtower, Polaris and the girl viewed the approach. Along the shoreline for miles the drift ice lay like a scum on the water, with here and there the remnant of a mighty iceberg jutting up. Of those, their own refuge was the largest remaining.

Beyond the drift ice the land seemed covered with heavy snow, and far inland were hills. To the northward, perhaps a mile, a mountain range that seemed like a mighty wall curved from the horizon to the lap of the sea, and terminated at the water's edge in a sheer and gleaming face, many hundred feet high. Just ahead a promontory extended out toward them, and beyond it lay a cove. The heavens to the southward were piled with dull cloud-banks that curled and shifted in the slow wind.

"It may be that this will be a rough landing, lady," said Polaris. "Our tower is going to pieces, and here we may not stay. I will make ready the sledge. We must cross the drift ice to the shore in some manner."

He packed their stores on the sledge, with the robes and all that made their little camp, and hauled everything to what seemed the most solid portion of the berg. Instinctive seemed the wisdom that guided the man. The twin bergs, driven on by the last impulse of the current, plowed through the drift ice like a stately ship, and were broken asunder across the point of the promontory. Their revolutions laid them right across the snow-covered point of land.

As they swung on, the berg which they had quitted was southernmost. There was a dull shock of impact, and beneath their feet the solid ice quivered. The farther berg pushed on around the point in a swirl of foam and ice. Their own ice castle swung to the north side of the promontory, keeled over at a terrifying angle, and began to settle.

Above them loomed the beetling masses of ice with the dark shadow of the cave mouth. Below was the nose of the promontory, covered deep with snow. Farther and farther leaned the berg.

"We have but a moment!" cried Polaris. "We must leap. The berg will fall on the land or slide into the sea. It is turning over!"

He seized the sledge, half lifted it, and hurled it from the tilting berg into the snow. Then he caught the girl in his arms and leaped, putting all his strength into the jump.

Out into the air they shot, and down, down. Around them as they fell the sky seemed to be showering dogs as the seven of the pack followed their master. Then man and girl and dogs vanished in the soft snow, and the iceberg went thundering and crashing to its fall.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT MANNER OF MEN?

BURIED many feet in the snow, with the struggling mass of dogs above and around them, Polaris and Rose Emer heard the muffled shock of the mighty crag and felt the rock beneath them vibrate. Masses of ice hurtled through the air and fell in the snow all about them, but they were unscathed.

When they floundered with much effort to the surface of the snow the crystal cliff that had been their home was gone. The waves were tossing and eddying where it had plunged over. Where it had ground the side of the point snow and ice had been torn away, leaving exposed the naked gray rocks. Around the head of the promontory drifted a long, low mass of yellow ice, water-worn and unlovely, that had been the bottom of the berg.

About them the snow was crusted, and the crust was punctured with many pits

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where fragments of the ice from the berg had fallen, and with other pits where the seven dogs of the pack had pitched headlong. One by one the gray runners crawled to the surface and emerged like rats from their holes to sprawl upon the snow crust, looking exceedingly foolish, as is the manner of dignified dogs when they are spilled promiscuously into such a predicament.

A little way from where the man and woman stood the sledge was upended in the drift. If walked over quickly the crust of the snow was firm enough to offer footing.

Polaris soon righted the sledge, which had suffered no harm in its fall, and inspanned the team. They set off for the shore over a succession of dips and rises along the back of the promontory.

Where it was joined to the shore, however, they found an obstacle. The land bristled with a bulwark of rocks, snow, and ice of a height to make it impossible for the man to guide the sledge over it.

Rose Emer had come to look to Polaris in the face of each new difficulty, finding in him an infinite resource and genius for surmounting them. She turned to him now, and found that he had solved the puzzle.

"We can scramble over this," he said; "you and I and the dogs, and we will find a spot suitable for landing the sledge along the shore. Then I will return and manage with the sledge across the drift ice. It is wedged in the cove yonder so firmly that it will be no great task."

The girl glanced down into the cove, where the glittering scum of fragments rose and fell with the swell of the waves, and her eyes widened; but she offered no objection. She had yet to see this man fail in what he attempted.

Using his spear for an alpenstock, Polaris took her by the arm, and they made the ascent of the rocks. Sometimes he lifted her as lightly as though she were a babe and set her ahead of him, while he climbed to a farther projection of the crags. Sometimes he carried her bodily in one arm and climbed on easily with the double weight.

So they reached the far side of the obstruction, and after them scrambled and leaped the pack.

To the east a plain stretched away toward the hills and the mountain wall—a plain rifted deeply with many gulleys and chasms, but passable. They found with little difficulty a break in the rocky rampart that fringed the bank of the cove where the sledge might be landed, and there Polaris left the girl and the dogs. He leaped onto the drift ice with a wave of his hand and set out across the cove for the point, marking as he went the safest and easiest course for his return with the sledge.

Rose Emer watched him cross and ascend the sloping side of the point. A moment later he reappeared, dragging the sledge, and launched it on the return trip. He disdained to lighten the load of it, in which manner he might have made his transport much more easily in two journeys.

Leaping from one large cake of ice to another, he hauled and pushed and dragged the entire load. Where dangerous intervals of small ice lay between the larger pieces, he crossed over, and with a heave of his magnificent shoulders pulled the sledge quickly across. What ten men might well have hesitated to attempt he accomplished with seeming ease.

He was more than half-way across the cove when the attention of the girl was distracted from him by a disturbance of the ice near the cove's mouth. Where there had been little motion of the drift ice she saw several of the fragments pitched suddenly from the water, and as they fell back she thought she glimpsed beneath them in the water the passing of a large, dark body.

As she wondered the ice was thrown violently aside in half a dozen places, and in the eddying water she saw the rudderlike fins and lashing tails of a school of some sort of monsters of the sea. They were headed in the direction of the laboring man.

She called a warning to him, but in the midst of the grinding of the drift and the noise of his own exertions he did not hear it. With no warning the danger was upon him.

He had dragged the sledge to the center of one of the larger cakes of ice, and paused to select his next objective. There was a rush in the water under the ice, the drift was parted suddenly, and a monstrous head with open mouth and a terrifying array of gleaming tusks rose dripping from the gap.

Over the edge of the man's floating footing this dread apparition was projected, a full eight feet of head and giant body thrust out of the sea in an attempt to wriggle onto the ice cake. The big flake of ice, perhaps fifteen feet across, titlted from the water under the weight of the monster, and it

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seemed that the man and sledge would be pitched straight into the yawning maw.

Then, with a clash of disappointed jaws, the head was withdrawn, the monster sank from sight, and the ice raft righted.

Rose Emer sank on her knees in the snow. Around her crouched the dogs, yelping, baying in fury at the sight of the diving danger. "Ah, Heaven help him!" she gasped. "The killer-whales!"

SUCH were the monsters which beset Polaris. All around the piece of ice on which he floated with the sledge the smaller drift was thrashed by their plunging bodies. Again and again they thrust their frightful snouts above the surface and strove to hurl themselves onto the ice cake. Some of them were more than twenty feet in length.

When the first hideous head appeared from the deep and nearly overturned his float Polaris stood as if frozen, staring at it in amazement. Such a thing he had never seen. He crouched on the ice and tightened his grip on his long spear. When he saw the number of his enemies he realized the futility of an attempt at battle with such weapons as he bore.

Immediately he became alert to outwit them. With his agility he might have essayed to cross the ice and elude them safely were he unhampered by the unwieldy sledge, but not for an instant did he consider abandoning it.

In a glance he picked out the next resting-spot, some feet distant across the drift. He pushed the sledge almost to the edge at one side of the cake, and sprang to the other side, halting on the brink and bracing himself, with his spear-blade dug deeply into the ice.

There was a rushing and thrashing of huge bodies as the killers piled over one another in their eagerness to reach their prey. Several frightful heads were thrust from the water, their dripping jaws snapping within a few feet of the intrepid man. Quick as light he dashed across the ice cake, snatched up the ends of the long harness, and crossed the drift to the next large fragment. Watching his chances, he yanked the sledge across to him.

A dozen times he repeated his tactics successfully and worked in near to shore. If he could accomplish his ruse once more he would win through; he would be above water so shallow that even the bold killers would not dare to follow him for fear of being stranded there. But nearer to the landing the drift had been ground finer, and there was not between him and the shore another large piece. There he made a stand and considered.

He heard the voice of the girl calling to him.

"Shoot!" she cried. "Shoot and wound one of them! If you maim it badly the others will turn and attack it. Then you can get away!"

Polaris tossed his arm in sign that he had heard, and drew from their holsters his brace of heavy revolvers. He had but an instant to wait. One of the savage killers reared his immense and ugly snout from the waters less than a rod away. Polaris fired both guns straight into the gaping jaws.

That was nearly his undoing, for so mighty a plunge did the scathed and frightened monster give that it shot nearly the whole of its ponderous body across the edge of the ice where the man stood and cracked the cake clean in two. Then it sank into the water, convulsively opening and closing its jaws, as if it would eject the stinging pellets which it had received. The water was dyed red around it.

In a trice the band of killers, which had dived at the report of the shots, surrounded their wounded comrade, and the carnage began. All thought of the man on the ice was abandoned for the moment as they rent in fragments and devoured one of their own kind. Above their horrid feasting the waves foamed crimson.

WHEN he saw how things were faring below him the man lost not a moment in crossing the remaining drift, dragging the sledge to the shore.

He turned and saw the baffled killers flock sullenly off to sea, whipping the drift contemptuously from their wake with lashing tails.

"Rose Emer, I thank you," he said simply. "I was hard put to it to know how to save the sledge, and you told me the right thing to do."

She smiled admiringly. A savage apparition to be feared; an instrument of deliverance sent by Providence; a friend and comrade to be admired and trusted—all of these things in turn had Polaris been to her. She found him a man wonderful in all his ways—a child of the vast chaos, yet gentle,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fierce and fearless in the face of peril, but possessed of a natural courtesy as unfailing as it was untaught—savage, savior, friend. Was he not becoming more than a friend—or was it all a glamour of the snows and seas and dangers which would fade and thrill no more when she returned to the things of every day?

Eager to be on the march after the days of enforced inactivity, they set off at once for the base of the mountain wall to the north, hoping that somewhere in its curving length they might find a pass or a notch in its face through which they might win the path to the far-away ship.

Under the cracking lash of the Southlander the dogs ran fast and true; but ever the mighty wall of the mountains stretched on, unbroken by notch or crevice, its side gleaming with the smooth ice of many thawing torrents that had frozen and frozen again until it was like a giant's slide.

If a man had many weeks to spare to the task he might cross it, cutting his steps laboriously one by one. For them, with their dogs and sledge, it was impassable.

The curve of the range pushed them relentlessly farther to the south as they went on to the south where far away across the plains lay other hills, above which cloud masses curled and drifted always.

On their third day's journey inland they found that which altered all the course of their wanderings, and led them on to great new things. They crossed the trail of the unknown.

Swiftly the seven gray coursers of the snows were speeding, noses down and plumed tails awave in the breeze of their going. The girl sat on the sledge, and beside it the man raced, light of foot as the dogs, and never tiring.

Then, in the midst of his stride, Marcus, the leader, set his four feet hard on the snow crust and slid on his hams, the six others piling up at his back in confusion with sharp yelps of consternation. Over the tangle of the pack whined and cracked the long whip of Polaris, and cracked and whined vainly. Marcus would not budge. He lifted his gray muzzle in a weird howl of protest and bewilderment, and the hair along his spine bristled.

Behind him Octavius, Julius, Nero, and Hector took up the cry of astonishment, and the mellower notes of Pallas and Juno chimed in.

Polaris straightened out, like the good driver that he was, the sad kinks in the harness and ran forward; but he had gone but a few paces when he, too, stopped in the snow, and stood staring ahead and down.

They were at the brink of a trail!

There it lay, stretching from somewhere near the base of the mountains, away across the great plains—a broad, recently traveled path, with footprints plain upon the snow—*the footprints of men!*

CHAPTER VIII

THE STRANGER

POLARIS stood so long at the lip of the strange path that Rose Emer uncurled from her seat on the sledge and ran forward to see what held him.

"A path—in this wilderness!" she cried in wonder. And then: "Why, we must be near to one of Captain Scoland's stations. Our troubles are nearly at an end."

"No, lady; I think these tracks lead to no station of your captain's, and our troubles may be just begun. Here are the tracks of many men—"

"But they must be those of our men," returned Rose Emer, "for who else could have made them?"

Polaris stepped into the trail and examined it with keen eyes.

"Lady, did they of your company dress their feet as do you or as I do?" he asked, pointing to his moccasins of bearskin.

"Why, they wore heavy boots of felt, with an overshoe of leather, spiked with steel," said the girl.

"And did they have with them any beasts other than the dogs of which you have told me?" queried Polaris.

Rose Emer shook her head. "No, they had only the dogs," she replied. "What tracks are there?"

Polaris arose from his examination of the trail. "Now, of all the strange things we have met by land and by sea, I account this the strangest of all," he said. "Here are the footprints of many men whose feet were clad as are my own, and with them the marks of a heavy sledge and the tracks of four-footed animals new to me—unless, indeed, they be those of dogs in boots—"

"What? Show me where!" Rose Emer knelt beside him to stare at the medley of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

footprints. She looked up at him wide-eyed a moment later.

"Why, this is impossible!" she gasped. "And yet—what *can* it mean? Those are the hoofprints of unshod horses!"

Polaris smiled down at her. "Remember the showers of ashes, Rose Emer; and that I told you that we were to learn some great new thing if we won safe to shore," he said. "Now are we at its gates. Stay—something glimmers yonder in the trail!"

He strode away, and returned shortly, bearing something that he had plucked from the snow.

"Bore any man in your company aught like this?" he asked, and held out to her a long, slender-bladed knife.

Wider grew the eyes of the girl in wonder as she took the weapon from him and looked at it. It was of one piece, both blade and shaft, nicely balanced and exquisitely wrought; but it was of no metal which the girl had ever seen. Only in the finest of iridescent glass had she ever seen the bewildering play of colors that was reflected from its bright blade when the sunlight fell on it. It was nearly a foot long, needle-pointed and razor-keen.

From the glittering dagger to the man's face the girl looked slowly. "There is no

His long knife gleamed as he stabbed the brute again and again under its massive shoulder

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

metal known in the world to-day like that from which this knife is made," said she. "Who and what are they who dropped it here? And here, there are letters on the blade. They look like Greek."

She pointed to a beautifully clear inscription running down the blade. It read as follows:

ΟΧΑΛΚΕΥΣΚΑΡΔΕΠΟΙΗΜΕ

Polaris took the knife quickly and read where the girl pointed.

"A strange thing in a strange land," he said. "The words *are* Greek. They read: '*Ho chalkeus Kard epoié me*'—'Kard the Smith made me.'"

In the midst of her amazement at their discovery the girl marveled again at the living wonder who stood before them—a man who had survived in this awful wilderness, and who had there acquired through the patience of his father an education superior to her own, with all her advantages. For Polaris spoke and read Greek and something of Latin, besides being conversant with several of the languages of the modern world.

"Now we must make choice," he said. "Shall we cross this path and go on, seeking a pass in the mountains? Shall we follow it back whither it came from, or shall we follow on whither it leads, and asked of them who made it if there be a way to the north that we may take?"

"Polaris," she answered, and the heart of the man thrilled to the answer, for it was the first time he had heard his name on her lips, "it must be as you think best. In these places I am helpless, and you are the master. We will do whatever you think for the best."

"No, lady; in no way am I the master," he replied quickly. "I do but wish to serve you. Perhaps it were better to go on alone. And then, perhaps again, it were much time and wandering saved to find these folk and ask them of the ways. It may be that they, too, have a ship and are on the trail of the great pole, although something seems to tell me that such is not so."

"You mean that you think they *live here?*" asked the girl.

Polaris inclined his head. "Yes, lady, and I am curious to see what manner of men they may be, they who drive horses across the snows and leave knives of unknown metal to mark their trail. Now it is for you to say."

THE end of it was that they turned south on the trail of the strange people, and as they went they wondered much who Kard the Smith might be, who stamped his wares with ancient Greek inscriptions, yet who did not shoe his horses—or ponies, for the hoofprints were very small.

It was only after some urging that Polaris persuaded the pack to take the path. When they did he let them out to their speed, for the going was plain, and he had no fear of accident in a road travelled by so many. Straight on the trail led them toward the cloud-tipped mountain cluster that lay dim to the south.

As they traveled other circumstances arose to puzzle them. Once a flight of strange birds passed far above them, flying in the same direction. They came to a spot where the strangers had made camp, and there were the remains of a fire *with charred wood.* Then as they drew nearer, with many miles passed, they saw that the haze which hung about the mountain summits appeared to be not of clouds, but of smoke.

On the second stage of their journey Polaris halted the dogs at a new wonder.

"Lady," he said, "look hard and tell me the color of those hills, or is it that my eyes are giving way to the snow blindness?"

Rose Emer arose in the sledge and gazed at the hills, and cried: "Green! Green! But how *can* they be?"

"Warm air, green hills, and people with horses," Polaris smiled. "It seems that such are not all in the north. Ah, the good green hills I have read of and which I have so longed to see!"

On sped the dogs, and nearer and nearer loomed the hills of green, set like immense, dull emeralds in the white of the snows. Only at their summits were they black and craggy and scarred. Above them spiraled shifting clouds of smoke.

And as they journeyed, the sun shining on the softening snows, and the air growing warmer and warmer, in an ice-locked sound five hundred miles to the north, a little company of weary-faced men gathered on the deck of the good ship Felix, and one of their number read the burial service for the repose of Rose and John Emer and Homer

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Burleson, strayed from the ship and given up for dead after a searching party had failed to find any trace of them.

As the travelers neared the base of the foot-hills of the mountain range the ground became more uneven, being broken by rock slopes and small hills, many of which were bare of snow. Around these the trail wound zigzag. They swung around one of the sharp curves, and Polaris reined in the dogs.

"Now, lady, here comes one along the trail who may solve for us all our riddles!" he cried, and pointed ahead.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAND OF TWENTY MOONS

NOT a quarter of a mile from them a man was running along the snow road toward them—a tall man, and well formed. He ran, or trotted slowly, with head bent, and many a sidewise glance along the borders of the trail.

"Now, I think that here is the owner of the knife come to seek it," muttered Polaris; and seeing that the stranger bore a spear, he reached his own long weapon from the sledge, and leaned on it as he watched the approach of the runner, the same quiet smile on his face with which he greeted all wonders.

Not until he was within a hundred yards of the sledge did the man see them. He came on fearlessly.

He was a swarthy fellow, black of beard, with a strong, high-featured visage, straight nose, and prominent cheek-bones. His hair hung from beneath a pointed cap of coarse, gray cloth, and was cropped at his collar. A tunic of brown material reached to his knees, and was clasped in front with several buckles. His feet were shod with high, furred moccasin-boots, which reached nearly to his knees, and which were bound with cross-strings. Above them were tight-fitting breeches of the same material as the tunic.

In a broad leather belt swung a small ax, a pair of large fur gloves, and an empty sheath. Ax-blade and buckles and the tip of his long, straight spear were all of the same iridescent metal as the dagger which Polaris had found in the snow. He was about forty years old.

When within a short spear-throw, he stood gazing at them, his eyes roving from man to girl, and from dogs to sledge, taking note of all. Then he spoke, in a deep and not unpleasant voice. Rose Emer understood a question in his inflection, but the language he spoke was unknown to her.

Polaris laughed and said quickly: "As it is written on the blade of the knife, so does he speak, Lady. It is Greek."

She looked from him to the stranger, wide-eyed. "What does he say?"

"He says, 'Whence come you?' and now I will answer him as best I can manage his tongue."

He turned to the strange man and lifted his voice. "We come from the north," he said.

"And who may you be," he queried the man, "who come down from the white north, through the lands where no man may travel, you who are like a child of the great sun, and who drive strange animals, the like of which were never seen?" and he pointed to the crouching dogs. "And who is she, the woman, who hath the aspect of a princess, and who rideth with thee across the snows?"

"Polaris am I named—Polaris of the Snows and she who is with me is Rose Emer, of America, and I am her servant. Now, who art thou, and how called?"

The man heard him with close attention. "I should judge thee little likely to be servant to any, thou Polaris of the Snows," he answered with a slow smile. "Part of thy words I comprehend not, but I name myself Kard the Smith, of the city of Sardanes."

"If thou are Kard the Smith, I have that which is thine," said Polaris, and he stepped forward and held out the dagger. "It bears thy name."

Kard took the weapon from him with a gesture of pleasure. "Not my name, O stranger of the snows," he said, "but that of my grandsire, Kard the Smith, three times removed, who did forge it. For that reason do I value it so highly that I came alone on the Hunters' Road willing to travel many weary miles and risk much to regain it."

"Is this that thou speakest thine only tongue, Kard the Smith?" pursued Polaris.

Kard nodded, and his eyes opened wide. "Yes, surely. And thou, who speakest it also, yet strangely, hast thou another?"

"Yes," said Polaris, "and thy language, I have been taught, is dead in the great world these many centuries. Who are thy

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

people, and where is the city of Sardanes?"

"The great world!" repeated Kard. "The great world to the north, across the snows! Aye, thy coming thence proves the tales of the priests and historians of Sardanes, which, in truth, many of us had come to doubt. To us, Sardanes and the wastes are all of the world.

"The city lieth yonder," and he pointed over his shoulder toward the smoking mountains. "Know thou, Polaris of the snows, that thou and thy princess are the first of all strangers to come to Sardanes; and now do I, Kard the Smith, bid thee a fair welcome."

He bowed low to Rose Emer and to Polaris, sweeping the snow with his rough cap.

TRANSLATING the outcome of his conversation with the stranger to Rose Emer, Polaris started the team along the trail, and with Kard trotting alongside the sledge, they set out for the mysterious city which he said lay beyond the mountains.

As they went, Polaris gathered from Kard that the people of Sardanes had lived in their land a very great while, indeed; that their population numbered some two thousand souls, and that they were ruled by a hereditary king or prince.

"For the rest, thou shalt learn it of the priests, who are more learned than I," said Kard; "and thine own tale of marvels, beside which ours is but a little thing, though I starve from desire to hear it, thou shalt reserve for the ears of the Prince Helicon. It were meet that he hear it first of all in Sardanes."

In an atmosphere that grew momentarily more temperate, they drew near to the green bulk of the mountains.

"What maketh the warmth of this land?" called Polaris to Kard.

The Smith raised his hand and pointed to the summits above them, where the great smoke clouds hung heavily in the quiet air.

"Within the bowels of the hills are the undying fires which have burned from the first," he said. "They have saved the land from the wastes. No matter how the storms rage on the snow plains, it is ever warm in Sardanes. The city lieth in a valley, ringed round by a score of fire mountains, set there by the gods when the world began. And when the season of the great darkness falleth, the flare of the eternal flames lighteth the valley. With the light of twenty moons is Sardanes ever lighted. Wait and thou shalt see."

Presently they came to the foot of the range. For a short distance above them lay snow in patches on the slopes, and beyond that extended a wide belt of grasses and trees. Still higher, all vegetation ceased, and the earth was bare and brown, and the rocks were naked.

Above all jutted the fire blackened crags of the summits, wild and bleak. Just ahead of them yawned a pass, which some vast upheaval had torn in the base of the range in the long ago.

"Now must the lady walk with us," said Kard, "for the way is rough, and the lack of snow will make it difficult for the animals to drag on the sledge."

He spoke truly. So rough was the way in places that Polaris must add his own strength to the pull of the dogs. Kard the Smith would willingly have aided also, but the dogs would not permit him to lay hand on the traces, nor could Polaris prevail on them to be friendly with the man.

Up and up they climbed the many turns of the pass, its seamed walls of rock beetling above them at both sides. So warm was it that Polaris, sweating and pulling with the pack, took off his cloak and inner coat of bearskin, and struggled on in his under garment of seal fur.

They came to the peak of the pass, and again it wound irregularly downward for a space. Its sides were less precipitous. Long grasses and shrubbery grew in the niches of the rocks, and the light of the sun penetrated nearly to the path.

"Ah, see, Polaris," cried Rose Emer, "there, in the rocks, my namesake is nodding to me. A rose, and in this land!"

In a cleft in the rock wall clung a brier, and on it bloomed a single magnificent red blossom. After the weeks of hardship and grief and journeying with death, the sight of the flower brought tears to the eyes of the girl.

While Kard stood and smiled, Polaris stopped the team. He clambered up the rocks, clinging with his hands, and brought it down, its delicate perfume thrilling his senses with a something soft and sweet that he could not put into thought. Rose Emer took it from him and set it in her breast.

That was a picture Polaris never forgot—the rocky walls of the pass, the sledge and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the wild dogs, the strange figure of the Sardanian, the girl and the red rose.

She had removed her heavy coat and cap, and now walked on ahead of them, her long blue sweater clinging to her lissom form, the sunshine glinting in the coiled masses of her chestnut hair. They rounded another turn, and Rose Emer gave a little gasp and stopped, and stood transfixed.

"Oh, here is, indeed, a garden of the gods!" she cried.

There the rock ledges ended, and they stood at the lip of a long green slope of sward, spangled with flowers. A valley lay before them, of which they were at the lower end. Ringed by the smoking mountains, it stretched away, some ten miles in length. From the lower hill slopes at either side it was perhaps a short mile and a half across. Adown its length, nearly in the middle, ran the silvery ribbon of a little river, which bore away to the right at the lower end of the valley, and was lost to sight in the base of the hills.

AT EITHER side of the river the land lay in rolling knolls and lush meadows, with here and there a tangle of giant trees, and here and there geometrical squares of tilled land—the whole spread out, from where the travelers stood, in an immense patchwork pattern, riotous with the colors of nature, and dotted with the white dwellings of men, built of stone.

On the higher slopes of the mountains at each side thick forests of mighty trees grew. Above the line of vegetation, the bare earth gave forth vapor from the inner heat, and farther up the naked rocks jutted to the peaks, half hidden in their perpetual mists and smoke.

There were twenty-one mountains, all of the same general appearance, with one exception. One great hill alone, which towered over to the left of them, was wooded thickly to its summit.

Everywhere in the valley was the sound of life. Birds flashed back and forth among the foliage; goats leaped among the rocks; small ponies grazed in the meadows; men tilled the fields. From the distance up the valley came the hum and splashing of a small waterfall. A couple of miles away, at the right of the river, was a large square of buildings that gleamed white in the sunlight, where many people were moving about.

"Behold, Sardanes!" said Kard the Smith, advancing to the edge of the rock.

Rose Emer caught the word Sardanes and echoed it.

"Sardanes," she breathed, and turned to Polaris with an awed look in her eyes. "It is as if a page of the ages had been turned back for us, isn't it?" she asked.

From the wondrous scene he glanced to the face of the girl and smiled quietly, and she remembered that here was one who gazed for the first time on the reality of the world of men of any age.

Kard raised his voice in a long, shrill call. His voice was lost in the angry baying of the dog pack as a small goat leaped from covert close to them and clattered away up the ledges.

At the combined clamor, several men raised their faces wonderingly from their work in a field near by. For a moment they gazed in amazement at the travelers, and then ran toward them, talking excitedly as they went.

All were clad lightly in sleeveless tunics of cloth that reached the knees. They wore no head coverings, and their faces and bare arms were tanned from exposure to the sun. Their feet were covered with leather sandals, buckled at the ankle. Their limbs were bare from the sandals to the short, loose-legged trousers, which they wore beneath their tunic skirts. The texture of their garments was dyed in several different hues.

Nearly all wore close-cropped beards like that of Kard, and their hair was trimmed at the neck. Armlets and rings and the buckles on their garments, all of the strange, iridescent metal, glittered in the sunlight as they ran.

For a moment there was a babel of astonished queries leveled at Kard the Smith as the men pulled up and drank in the sight of the strangers and their yet stranger beasts, now roused to a frenzy which required all of the authority of Polaris to hold in bounds. "Who?" and "What?" and "Where?" came in breathless succession from the mouths of the Sardanians.

"Now, be quiet, all of you, that I may tell you," commanded Kard with a disgusted wave of his hand. They were spoiling his peroration for him.

"These," and he waved his hand again, "be Polaris of the Snows, and Rose Emer of America, come to visit Sardanes. The man with the sunlight hair and eyes of the sky

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hath lived in the outer snows all his life, he saith. The woman," and Kard bowed ow, "is a great princess from the world far o the north, beyond all the snows, the vorld whereof the priests have sung."

Truly, the imagination of Kard was equal o the effect he wished to produce on his ellows. Their tongues stilled by their wonder, they gazed at the man and the woman. Then, as by common impulse, they bowed low, with sweeping gestures of their right hands. A fresh chorus of questions would have broken out, but Kard quickly forstalled it.

"The rest of my tale, also the wonders which the strangers may unfold, wait the ear of the Prince Helicon," he said curtly. Now, haste ye and bring horses to transport the strangers' goods, for their beasts are aweary, and we will proceed to the judgment House."

Two of the younger men hurried to one of the nearer dwellings and returned shortly with two span of the small horses which grazed in the meadows. They were in harness, and it was not difficult to attach them to the sledge in place of the dogs, which Polaris took out of harness and held in leash. Fearing that Sardanian legs would suffer if he did not, he took the precaution to bind the muzzle of each dog with thongs.

A lad mounted the sledge and cracked a long whip, and the stout ponies bent to the work of hauling the sledge.

With Kard leading the way, Polaris and Rose Emer set off in the direction of the square of white buildings up the valley. Their dogs huddled closely around them, a formidable body-guard, and with them marched an escort of Sardanians, momentarily augmented by every new man who set eyes on them.

EVERYTHING that he saw was a marvel to Polaris. And for Rose Emer, who had wandered up and down the world considerably, the ancient valley was spread with wonders. Never had she seen, outside of California, trees of such giant girth and height as some of those which grew at the base of the hills; and they were of no kin to the Californian Sequoia. Birds that she could not name flew among their branches.

Set in the midst of their orderly little farms were houses of a sort not seen in the world to-day. They were constructed for the most part of colored stone, faced with white, and with high-pillared porticoes. Each brought a memory of a pictured temple of antiquity.

They crossed the river on a small bridge of green stone. As they drew nearer to the square of buildings they could see that it was evidently a public gathering place. Each of its four fronts was a lofty peristyle, inclosing a square of considerable size. Through its arches they caught sight of a raised stage, facing many seats of stone.

News of their coming had preceded them. From all directions people were flocking into the public square and occupying the stone seats.

"All who live in the valley are gathering to bid us welcome, lady," said Polaris, and added an echo to the thoughts of the girl, "May our leave-taking be as peaceful as our welcome!"

When they had arrived at the square they found that it stood in the center of a pleasant park, with clumps of trees, stone-curbed pools, and playing fountains. Scattered about on massive pedestals were groups of statuary of no mean artistry, some in white marble and others of colored stones. For the most part fanciful subjects were represented, but some of the groups evidently were of a historical significance.

One, in particular, of large size, showed a company of men landing on a shore from the decks of a ship. The vessel bore a marked resemblance to an ancient galley, such as Rose Emer often had seen pictured. There were the high decks and the banks of oars.

All these sculptured men wore armor and trappings of patterns as ancient as the ship, heightening the likeness of this place of Sardanian art to an antique Greek statuary. Around the central building lay a paved plaza.

Conducted by their escort, which had grown to nearly a hundred men, Rose Emer and Polaris and their gray comrades entered the building through one of the high arches. The entrance led to one side of the raised stage.

While the members of their Sardanian escort scattered to the seats below, Kard the Smith ushered the man and the girl to a flight of stone steps by which they gained the dais.

On the platform was another raised piece of marble work, of glistening white, a flight of steps leading up to a carved double

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

throne, set between two pillars. Across the tops of the pillars was a scrolled plinth, inscribed with Greek lettering as follows:

ΕΛΙΚΩΝΚΡΕΩΝΤΗΣΣΑΡΔΑΝΗΣΟΦΘ

" 'Helicon, the ninety-ninth prince of Sardanes,' " Polaris translated for Rose's benefit. "In the original, *'Helikon kreon tes Sardanes ho kop-pa-theta.'* "

On the space below the throne were a number of other stone seats. Throne and platform were empty, with one exception. A little apart from the other seats was one of black stone, and on it was seated a young man. His garb was similar to that of the other Sardanians, but was of exceedingly fine texture, and all of black, unrelieved by any ornament or touch of color.

When the strangers came upon the platform he turned toward them a long-favored, highly intellectual countenance. His face was shaven smoothly, and his long black hair was held back from his temples by a band of black cloth. He reclined rather than sat in his stone chair, with an elbow on its arm and his chin on his hand.

As Polaris and Rose Emer became visible to the people below a subdued hum of excitement arose; but the young man on the black stone seat remained impassive, and regarded them with a steady, searching gaze, with no outward evidence of surprise.

"A greeting to thee, Kalin, priest of Sardanes!" called Kard, throwing out his hand in salutation. The young man replied with a careless movement of the hand that lay in his lap, without disturbing his posture of repose.

Down in the great hall hundreds of Sardanian eyes were centered on the strangers. Momentarily the seats were filling with new arrivals. Nearly half of the gathering were women, and many of them were handsome.

They were costumed in kirtles, belted in below the bosom and flowing loosely to below the knee. They wore their hair in plaits, coiled about the tops of their heads. Ornaments of glittering metal bedecked their garments and hair. Their feet were clad in sandals of soft leather, laced above the ankles, and in half stockings of cloth, gartered and bowed below the knees. Rose Emer was quick to note that some of them were striking beauties.

Without exception, they were brunettes.

Kard conducted Polaris and the girl to seats at one side and a short distance from the central throne.

"We bide the coming of the Prince Helicon," he explained, "who cometh shortly."

For a few moments they sat in silence. Then voices were heard from an entrance at the far side of the stage, and with one accord the Sardanians in the hall rose from their seats.

"The prince cometh!" murmured Kard.

Polaris and Rose Emer arose also.

CHAPTER X

THE GATEWAY TO THE FUTURE

EVERY Sardanian hand in the great ha' was uplifted in salute as five men entered through one of the pillared arches. Two of them were of bearded middle age, evidently persons of station in the land; but the eyes of the throng and the eyes of Rose Emer and Polaris passed them indifferently, to gaze on the three who followed.

It did not need the whisper of Kard the Smith, "He in the center is the prince," to distinguish the ruler of Sardanes. He was not more richly garbed than his companions, or differently. Neither was he taller than they, or of more commanding presence. All of the three were of great height, and all carried themselves regally. Something in the mien of his high-featured, thoughtful face, in his large black eyes, and in the lines of his smoothly shaven countenance bespoke his kingship as surely as though a herald had preceded him and cried out: "This is Helicon, Prince of Sardanes!"

The three were brothers, Helicon, the eldest, was well under thirty years. The two who walked on either side of him were of the startling likeness to each other found only in twins.

Surprise was written large on the features of all of the party as they came into the open space before the throne, and they halted. The two nobles stared frankly. The faces of the twin princes expressed a kindly curiosity, not unmixed with the general awe in which the Sardanians held the strangers. In the face of Helicon was a similar expression, but with less of awe and more of grave dignity.

His eyes roved over the pack of dogs, to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him the most unusual figures of the group; hesitated in admiration at the splendid form of Polaris, and passed to Rose-Emer.

As their glances met, the eyes of the prince opened wide, and seemed suddenly to become suffused. Then they snapped back to the face of Polaris, and seemed to carry a quick question. The son of the snows regarded him calmly; but there was in his calmness a challenge, the more deadly because of its quietude. His right hand, which rested on the neck of Marcus, contracted so powerfully that the dog whined in pain. Polaris knew that he had found an enemy.

Helicon swung on his heel and ascended the steps to the throne.

The nobles and the two tall princes took seats, and Kard the Smith, with the enthusiasm of the born orator, stood forth to tell his story.

"The man, sayest thou, cometh out of the snows, and speaketh our tongue?" interrupted Helicon in the midst of the tale.

"Even so, prince," said Kard.

"And the woman cometh from beyond, and speaketh not our language, but one of her own, which the man speaketh also? And the woman is a princess in her own land?"

"That, O prince, is true!"

"Then cease though thy tale, Kard, and let us hear from the man in our tongue, of himself and of the princess, and of how they came hither."

With little relish for such cutting short of his bombast, Kard the Smith stood back and yielded the floor to Polaris.

In a few words the man of the snows sketched the chances which had brought the girl and himself to Sardanes.

"Then thou wert reared in the great wilderness, and knowest naught of the world, or of Sardanes, or even of who thou thyself art?" questioned Helicon. His voice was even and courteously intoned; but, though the man he questioned was of little experience, Polaris understood the sneer that lay in the words.

"So it seemeth, Prince Helicon," he answered quietly.

"And the woman thou didst find in the snows, she is a princess? I can well believe that."

"Nay, prince, for she cometh from America, a great land where there are no princes or princesses. Yet is she of high rank in her land, as her birth and wealth entitle her."

Helicon frowned. "How meanest thou—a land in which are neither princes or princesses?" he asked quickly. "How, then, are the people in that land ruled?"

"By the people themselves are the people ruled in America, O prince," Polaris answered. "The whole of the country and its lesser divisions are governed by men chosen by the people to rule for certain spaces of years, when others are chosen."

"Are there, then, no kings or princes in the world?" asked Helicon sharply.

"Aye, princes and kings rule in many of the lands of the world," answered Polaris, "but their power is limited more and more by the wishes of their people. In some other lands the government is like that in America."

"Truly, this America of which thou speakest must be a strange country. Here in Sardanes I hold the power of decision over life and death; aye, even unto the Gateway to the Future extendeth the power of Sardane's prince."

"Yet," and the voice of Polaris rang like a bell—"yet, of all lands in the world, is America the greatest—and hath no prince or king."

Over the face of the prince passed a flush of annoyance. He waved his hand in dismissal of the conversation.

"Hospitality shall be thine, outlander of the snows. Thou shalt rest and be refreshed. More of thy strange tales will I hear anon. And the girl—" His eyes softened as they strayed again to Rose Emer, and again the red blood flashed up in his cheeks. For a moment he seemed lost in his thoughts.

ALL THROUGH the interview the young man in the black stone seat had sat motionless and attentive, his eyes glued on the strangers, his ears drinking in every word spoken by Polaris, his expression rapt. Now he arose and stepped forward. Before the Prince Helicon could speak again he interposed.

"If it be pleasing to the strangers, I, Kalin the Priest, will make them welcome at mine own home in the Gateway to the Future." Without waiting for the objection which the prince seemed to be framing, Kalin addressed himself directly to Polaris.

"Is the hospitality of Kalin welcome to thee, O man with the hair of the sun? Much there is that Kalin fain would learn from thee, and perhaps some little that he may tell thee in return. Say, wilt come, thou and the woman?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Polaris looked into his eyes, and somewhere in their dreamy depths he thought he read more meaning than the words of the priest conveyed to him. He stepped forward and tendered his hand, a form of salutation which, although new to the Sardanians, Kalin accepted.

"Thy most kind offer of hospitality I accept for myself and for the lady," Polaris said. "She hath, I fear, much need of rest."

They left Helicon on the throne in the Judgement House, looking as if he liked the new arrangement little enough. As they passed out of the hall, five or six men, all dressed in somber black, detached themselves from the crowd of Sardanians and joined Kalin the priest. Under his direction

As they jumped the sky seemed to shower dogs

they fetched the sledge and drove it toward the lower end of the valley, whither Kalin and his two guests followed.

On the way Polaris told Rose Emer of the meaning of the conversation in the hall, which she had understood only so much as she was able to guess from the demeanor of the prince and of Polaris. As they talked, Kalin, although their tongue was unknown to him, courteously walked ahead.

"They seem to be a happy people, but I don't think I'm going to like this prince

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of theirs," said Rose Emer when she heard the details of the talk. "And you, who never have seen America, have so defended it that you have put the gentleman out sadly. From what you have said to him, he will think that we have no very exalted opinion of princes. If he were not such a grave-looking personage I should think that he tried to flirt with me."

"What is the meaning of 'flirt,' lady?" asked Polaris.

Rose Emer's answer was a silvery laugh. "Sometimes, in your cold and snows, your knowledge makes me feel like a child; but when you get back to where I came from you will have a great deal to learn," she said lightly.

In spite of the privations and terrors through which she had passed, and the grief at the loss of her brother, the spirits of Rose Emer were rising amazingly in the warmth and sunshine of Sardanes. For all her lightness of speech, the girl could not but feel alarmed at the expression she had read in the eyes of the Prince Helicon, although she would not admit to Polaris that she had taken note of it.

They crossed the little bridge again and the plain beyond it, and began the ascent of the one green mountain that stood verdure-clad in strange contrast to its score of bleak-crowned sisters.

"What do they mean by the 'Gateway to the Future,' Polaris?" asked the girl.

Polaris, in turn, put the question to Kalin.

"It lieth before us," said the priest, pointing to the green mountainside. "Hast thou not noted that in all Sardanes no man or woman is old, or crooked of body, or diseased? When the first chills of age creep upon a Sardanian and bow his form and whiten his hair, then he cometh to me and passeth through the gateway. Thither likewise come the dead when one dieth in the land through a mischance or sudden illness. To me also are brought the babes that are misshapen at birth or that give promise of but puny life.

"To that which lieth beyond life, be it of glory or of oblivion, all Sardanians pass through the Gateway to the Future; and I, Kalin, am guardian to the gateway. The gateway itself shalt thou see anon."

Polaris translated. Rose Emer shuddered. "And I thought them such a happy people!" she said. "How can they be with such strange, terrible customs?"

Kalin, it seemed, had the trick of reading people's thoughts, for he answered:

"It hath been so almost from the first. When our ancestors peopled Sardanes they came to realize that for them to live on in the small land and remain a people their numbers must be limited. Thus hath it been done.

"Sardanians know of no other way, and are content therewith. Think of what is spared—terrible old age that creepeth on a strong man and decays him; that withers his limbs and fades the bloom of youth in his cheeks; of the horrors and distempers which make of life a misery and a mockery; of the sorrow of living on misshapen and helpless. In thy world do all such abide with thee?"

Polaris told him that in the world each one waited for his appointed hour of death, and that it was sin to hasten it for another or for oneself. The priest shrugged his shoulders.

Higher and higher they ascended the wooded slopes of the mighty hill, and came to a ledge many yards in width, so earthed and covered with vegetation and trees that it was like a huge terrace. There were a number of dwellings similar to those below in the valley. At the back of the terrace the side of the mountain was sheer for many feet and covered with vines.

In the center, at the level of the terrace, stood a giant facade of white stone, carved and scrolled and pillared. Through its arches they looked into the entrance to a lofty gallery in the heart of the rock.

Kalin ushered them into a room in one of the houses, and attendants fetched them fruits and bread with a sweet, unfermented wine. In another building near the edge of the terrace he showed Polaris a building, used as a stable for a number of the small ponies, where he might bestow the dogs; and at his word another of his servants brought both bread and flesh for the animals. When they were refreshed the priest led them to couch-rooms, bidding them to rest.

"Take thou thy rest well, man of the snows; there is much in thy path to try thee," he said to Polaris with a slow smile. Thinking on the enigma of his words, and of the wonders of the lost world, Polaris fell into the deep sleep which his body craved.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHAPTER XI

THE FIERY PORTAL

AWAKING after many hours, Polaris found Kalin standing by his couch.

"Stranger, thou sleepest well. Like an untroubled babe's are thy slumbers," said the priest. "And yet, if I read thee aright, thou art in all ways a strong man. The woman is outdone and sleepeth well. There is that which I would have thee see."

He led him to the edge of the terrace. A little procession of Sardanians was toiling up the path by which they had come. Among them walked a man who was the center of the group, to whom the others, one by one, spoke affectionately, but who answered little. As they came nearer, Polaris saw that he was in the prime of his life and of noble figure; but his limbs were wasted and his face was drawn with lines of suffering.

At the brink of the terrace the group halted. One by one his companions bade the man farewell, lifting their hands in the Sardanian salute. One young woman threw herself, weeping, into his arms, and he kissed her tenderly.

Then the other members of the party took their way down the mountainside again, leading with them the weeping girl. The man came on alone. On the terrace he was received by two of the black-robed attendants of Kalin.

The priest drew Polaris to one side, and they proceeded out of view of the man by a roundabout way to the great stone arch.

"Hither cometh one sore afflicted with illness who would pass the gateway, and thou shalt see him pass," said the priest.

They entered through the arch into the vast cavern beyond, and soon were in darkness, to which, however, the eyes of Kalin seemed to be well accustomed. He led Polaris swiftly through many galleries in the bowels of the mountainside, ever upward, until they reached a broad way, dimly lighted from above, which took a spiral course through the rock. Up the spiral way they passed, and it gave after three or four turns upon a wide, rocky floor, which curved away to either side of where they emerged.

Above them many feet towered the rocky ring of the volcano, of which they were in the crater. Its walls were beetling, scarred with ancient fires, seamed and ragged. Crag upon crag, ledge upon ledge, rose the wall; to where its circle cut a round expanse of blue sky.

All around them the massive rock reverberated to the muffled roar of a great fire far below. Where the shelving rock floor gave into space, clouds of luminous vapors rose from out the mighty pit of the crater. Where the sun's rays beat down through it, far above them, the billowing mass was golden. Directly ahead of them it seethed in a shifting play of colors, now lurid red, now green and yellow and blue, in the reflection cast up from the flickering flames below.

At times the vapor clouds were wafted aside by air currents, and Polaris could see the wall of the crater opposite, some two hundred feet across the pit.

To the left the shelf of rock narrowed to a mere thread of a pathway, overhung by the bulge of the crag wall. At the right a number of low buildings of rock had been constructed along the face of the cliff.

Kalin led Polaris to where the rock overhung the path, and showed him a number of footholds in the wall, by which he might climb to another small ledge above, and from which he could command a view of the platform, and also look down directly into the fearsome pit of flames. The priest then withdrew to one of the buildings.

Polaris crouched at the brink of the little shelf and gazed down through the many-hued vapor clouds which were wafted by him continuously. Occasionally, when they were swept aside by drafts of air, he could see the very bottom of the crater over which he clung. It was a sight to awe the heart of the bravest.

Hundreds of feet from where he crouched seethed and boiled and eddied a terrible caldron of chromatic heat. It was evident that the volcano was slowly dying, a death that might continue for centuries.

Nearer to the base of the crater its circumference was greater. At its bottom, in the course of ages, the substance of the fires had cooled, forming a crust against the calcined rock walls. As the fires themselves had sunk lower they had added to the deposit of crust, leaving it in the shape of a huge funnel.

In the funnel itself stewed and sweltered a lake of fire. It was nearly an acre in extent, bounded by the glowing circumfer-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ence of the funnel. Its molten substance boiled and eddied in a fury of heat. Immense volumes of gas were continually belched up through it with startling detonations, spouting many feet in the air, to flame a brief instant, while the blazing masses they threw up with them fell splashing back into the fearful reek. For yards above the surface of the caldron the crust glowed a dull red. Even where the man sat the heat was withering.

Voices on the rock shelf to his right drew the attention of Polaris from the broiling inferno, into which he had gazed fascinated.

From the spiral path up which he had lately climbed stepped one of the black-garbed priests, bearing a flickering torch. Behind him, walking with firm step and quiet gestures, was the Sardanian Polaris had seen crossing the terrace. On either side of him marched two other priests, and a fourth brought up the rear of the little procession. All four of the priests wore veils, through which their eyes glittered somberly.

THEY halted a few feet from the brink of the fiery precipice. By the light of the priest's torch Polaris saw that the rock floor had been cut away into a runway, or chute, at a sharp angle from the floor level, notching the edge of the declivity and ending sharply in the empty air of the great pit. The sides of the trough glittered like polished glass in the light rays.

One of the priests disappeared into the nearest of the stone buildings and came out bearing a disk of dark wood. It was concaved and not much larger than a warrior's shield, which indeed it much resembled, for within it were two loops of rope or thong, which might have served for armholds. The priest set it down near the upper end of the channel in the rock.

More torches hung in cressets along the wall were lighted, their flames reflecting from thousands of little veins and flecks of metal in the rock, and heightening the eery effect of the strange scene.

When these preparations were completed, Kalin stepped forth on the ledge. He was garbed in a flowing robe of flame red, his head hidden in a veiled hood, of which the section that covered his face was white.

He stepped in front of the waiting man and raised his hand in a solemn salute.

"Chloran, son of Sardon; thou hast come to the Gate?" he asked.

"Aye, priest," answered Chloran.

"Thy house is in order, thy farewells made, thy work done?"

"Aye, Chloran stands ready."

"Then thou comest content to the temple of the Lord Hephaistos?"

"Well content."

"Chloran, son of Sardon, we, the ministers of the Lord Hephaistos, are but the guardians of the Gate. We know not what lieth beyond it, but thou shalt soon learn. Be it of good or of evil for thee, thine own heart mayest answer, the depths of which no man may know. I, Kalin the Priest, bid thee farewell on thy journey to a greater knowledge than is Kalin's. To the Lord Hephaistos, whose servant I am, I commend thee."

He raised his hand again, and Chloran bowed his head. One of the attendant priests came up, bearing a metal vase.

"Quaff deeply of the wine of Hephaistos," said Kalin. The man clutched the vase and drank. Almost immediately his eyes glazed, and he stood like a man of stone. Two of the priests led him to the chute and seated him on the wooden shield, binding his thighs with the thongs.

"Welcome, Chloran, to the Gateway to the Future," cried Kalin. But Chloran heard him not. The powerful drug in the wine bound his senses. His head fell forward. At a sign from Kalin the two priests shoved the shield into the chute. Down the polished way it whirled, and shot out into the fiery rift.

Polaris clung at the brink of the little ledge and strained his eyes out into the terrible, fire-shot chasm to watch the fall. With its living burden the shield whirled down through the curling vapors, straight toward the molten caldron that tossed and roared in the funnel. In a breath it had fallen so far that it looked like a toy fluttering above the flames.

Then it was gone. So intense was the heat into which it fell that it seemed to dissolve into vapor before it ever touched the surface. A long, yellow tongue of flame shot up from the surface of the lake.

Polaris turned to the ledge. The priests had extinguished the torches and disappeared. Presently Kalin came forth from his chapel and called to him. With one more glance into the depths of the sinister pit, he descended from his perch in the rock and joined the priest.

They proceeded toward the chapel.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As Polaris passed the chute he stumbled. His feet shot from under him and down on his back he fell on the polished stone, and he, too, went whizzing head first down the way that Chloran, son of Sardon, had taken into the terrible firepit of Hephaistos!

Head first he shot down. As he slid by a mighty effort he turned over in the chute and thrust out his arms. The chute was about the width of a man's height. Polaris was exceptionally broad of shoulder, and his arms were long, so that his hands rubbed the sides of the chute.

Just as his head thrust over the brink of the awful chasm his hands found holds at either side of the chute. Whoever had cut the way in the rock in the long ago had left, almost at the very edge, a cleft in each side that was large enough for hand-grip. Very probably they were the holds by which the artisans steadied themselves while they hewed and polished the stone of the chute.

In those clefts the groping fingers of Polaris caught and held. The impetus of his body would have torn away the hold of a man less splendidly muscled than the son of the snows; but with a mighty wrench of his arms he stayed his progress and hung with head projected over the brink of the pit.

All in an instant it happened, and with no noise; for Polaris, fearful as was his plight, did not cry out, and neither did Kalin, who saw him fall. From out of the blackness that was behind him Polaris heard the priest gasp, and then for a moment all was silence but for the roaring of the fires far below.

Kalin crept to the brink of the precipice and peered over. Below him he saw the head of Polaris.

"Now," he muttered to himself, but not so low that Polaris could not hear him—"Now, I think it were well perhaps for Sardanes, and especially well for the Prince Helicon, did I let this stranger go on his way to Hephaistos. Nay, but he is a brave man, and I have come to like him strangely, and I cannot.

"Ho, thou, Polaris of the Snows, canst hold that grip of thine while I fetch rope?" he called aloud.

"Aye, Kalin the priest, I can hold for many minutes if so be thou art minded to aid me," answered Polaris grimly. "If thou art not, then I go hence through this strange gate of thine."

"Hold, then," said the priest, and hurried to the chapel, marveling at the hardihood of the man, who hung on the brink of death, and who cried not for aid or mercy.

Back he came in a moment with a stout rope and cast the loop of it over Polaris's head. Then he stepped back, braced his feet against the rocky floor, and, exerting a strength whereof his slender frame did not seem capable, he dragged Polaris from his perilous resting-place.

WHEN he felt the firmness of the floor beneath his feet again Polaris drew a long breath. He turned to the priest and looked him closely in the eyes.

"Kalin, henceforth I may not doubt that in Sardanes I have found a friend. Thanks for thy deed I have not the words to express to thee. If ever thou are in evil case may I be as near to aid thee." He extended his hand and wrung that of the priest until Kalin winced.

Together the two went down the spiral way through the mountainside to the house of the priest.

"Thou hast taken note of all that occurred?" asked Kalin. Polaris nodded. "And has understood?" continued the priest.

"Not altogether. Who is the Lord Hephaistos? That name is known to me as that of the armorer god of the Greeks of old, but only one of their many gods. How is it that ye of Sardanes, who also speak the tongue of those Greeks, worship the dead god of a people long dead?"

"Stranger, thou speakest boldly to the hereditary priest of the religion of Sardanes," replied Kalin, and a quizzical smile played about his lips. "Thou spakest boldly also to the Prince of Sardanes, thou, who art but one alone in a strange land. I think that fear abides not in thee. But—" and he rested his hand on the shoulder of Polaris—"perhaps Kalin doth but love thee the better for thy temerity. And Kalin's self, although he be of Sardanes, yet seemeth at times to feel strangely alone. As for the religion, I will show to thee the annals of the Sardanians, with what of history, both of the people and the religion, they contain. Perchance, in thy world, shouldst thou indeed ever reach it—and it comes to me that thou wilt—these tales will find ready ears, and be to thy great credit."

From a stone seat in front of the house of the priest a figure arose and came for-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ward to meet them, and Polaris and Kalin halted and gazed in wonder. Rose Emer it was—a new and amazing Rose. Ministered to by one of the women of the priest's household, she had slept and bathed, and then had arrayed herself in the full costume of a Sardanian lady of quality, which the woman had brought her.

Around her slender form, clinging to each gracious curve was draped a flowing kirtle of a delicate blue tint, belted in below her bosom with a broad girdle of soft, tan-colored leather. Its skirt swept the tops of a pair of gossamer hose of the same hue as the gown. Her feet were encased in neat little laced sandals of material similar to that of the girdle.

To complete the effect, her long chestnut hair was plaited and coiled about her head in the Sardanian fashion, and the whole was set off with a filmy blue veil, bound turban-wise, its tassels falling on her shoulder.

Kalin advanced and bowed, a courtly and sweeping genuflection.

"Thou dost Sardanes honor, lady, and all the valley is the brighter for thy beauty," he murmured.

Then Kalin fetched forth a packet of manuscripts, well written in Greek characters on parchments that were yellowed and crinkly with extreme age.

"Here be the records of a nation," he said, and set to work to sort them over.

CHAPTER XII

WAR AND AN ARMISTICE

FROM many an ancient parchment Kalin read to them bits of the lore of the Sardanians, and a strange store of knowledge and incident did the yellowed, leathery scraps unfold. For, as might be judged, the Sardanians had come down from Antiquity; and, as might be guessed, they were an offshoot of old Greece – the Greece that Homer sang.

"Some great city had been sacked," explained the priest, "and from its siege one adventurous party of warriors, with some of their women, turned their faces from their home across the Aegean Seas to the Pillars of Hercules even"—which means that they sailed through the Mediterranean to the Straits of Gibraltar—"and passed the pillars to the great seas beyond. There they sail north, seeking the barbarous isles, where strange metals and red-haired slaves might be gathered"—Britain.

"From the isles they turned southward toward home again, but a great tempest took their ship and whirled it away from the coasts. Down past the Pillars of Hercules the storm drove them, along the coasts of Libya"—Africa. "For weeks were they buffeted in a mighty gale, whirled ever to the south into the gates of the ice gods. Nearly perishing in the cold and for lack of food, on a day a mighty wave came from the north and their ship rode the crest of it through the barriers of ice, and came to this place.

"On a snow-bound shore they landed, those Acheans, with their women and their captives, and pushed on toward the green mountains, whose smoky summits they could not see ahead of them to the south. Thus they came to Sardanes, finding it even as ye see it this day, except that the Gateway to the Future was then as are its sister mountains, for the eternal fires flared at its top.

"So was Sardanes peopled, and the Sardanians of to-day are all the descendants of that little ship's company and their women and their captives from the barbarous isles. For a time they were sore beset in the valley by the great beasts which dwelt here, and they were fain to make their homes in the caves of the smoking hills. But as the years drew on they slew the beasts, and some of the great bones remain even until now in witness of their struggles. Then they built their homes in the valley and throve and multiplied and became a people."

"But what of the Gateway to the Future and the worship of the Lord Hephaistos?" asked Polaris, who had followed the tale of the priest with minute attention, translating it the while to the girl, who listened breathlessly to this unfolding of the pages of the dead past.

"Hephaistos was the smith god of the Acheans," answered Kalin, "and when they came hither they believed that it was Hephaistos who had shown mercy to them and saved them out of the cold and the icy seas. This valley, said the wise men, must be the forge and smithy of the god himself. So, as he had taken them under his protection and set them to dwell in his workshop, they came to worship him alone of all the gods they had known.

"Then, in time, when the ancient fires began to burn low in one of the hills, it was believed that the god was angered, and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

many sacrifices were made, that he might not forget the people and withdraw from the valley the warmth and light of his forge fires. Should he do so, the valley must go back to the arms of the snows and the people of Sardanes perish miserable one by one with the coming of the terrible cold.

"Thus grew up the customs of the religion which thou hast seen, but ever the ancient fires eats deeper in the pit of the mountain, and ever a great fear lies in the hearts of all Sardanians that some time the fires of the other mountains will follow that fire and leave Sardanes the prey of the ice and snow and darkness that wait without her gates."

Then Kalin questioned Polaris in turn of the world, and listened with an intentness that was wistful to stories of the histories of the great peoples that have ruled the earth since the Greece of which his traditions told him.

"Ah, that I might see it!" he sighed. "Fain I am to fare to the North with thee, and to see the great world and to learn new things before I go into the darkness. But I know not how that may be."

Polaris learned from the priest that his office had been handed down from father to son for uncounted centuries, but that he himself was unwed, and thus far had no successor. He learned further that a few years before, on the coming of Prince Helicon to the throne of Sardanes, there had been a division in church and state, as it were—that the headstrong prince would have none of the domination or advice of the priesthood in conducting the affairs of the kingdom.

In consequence of that, there was a coolness between the prince and Kalin, and each had his followers in the land. Some of the people sided with the prince. Others were for the priests and the religion, and looked with terror on anything that might anger further the Lord Hephaistos. Thus far, however, there had been no open break, and the relations of the prince and his brethren with Kalin and the priests of the gateway, if cold, were not openly hostile.

"And now," said Kalin, with a strange smile, "thou comest to Sardanes, thou and the lady with thee, and Kalin sees a storm in the brewing."

"How meanest thou?" questioned Polaris quickly, although he guessed at Kalin's meaning. "We come but to tarry a brief space, and then to find our way to the North again, where is the lady's home, and whither Polaris carries a message of the dead."

"That way to the North may be hard to win, my brother," answered Kalin. "What wilt thou do if the Prince Helicon shall decree that thou goest not?"

Polaris laughed shortly. "Not by the Prince Helicon, or by any who dwell in Sardanes, shall Polaris be kept from that way to the North," he answered. "Not while the breath of life is in his body."

"Whatsoever be thy ways, O stranger, know that Kalin wisheth thee but good fortune, and will lend thee his aid to it. Aye, even though it crosseth the desires of the Prince Helicon, as well it may," he muttered.

Grown suddenly sober, Rose Emer laid her hand earnestly on Polaris's arm. "Can we go back to the North?" she asked. "Is it possible? Is there a chance that we can cross those leagues of snow and ice and live to find our ship?"

The man looked into her eyes. "Lady, is it your wish to go?" he questioned.

"I must go back, back to my home, and—Oh, we *must* go; but you— Will it not be at the risk of our lives?"

Polaris smiled quietly. "Where the Lady Rose wishes to go, Polaris will not be left behind. I, too, *must* go to the North. I will not even suggest that you might wait here on a chance that I might fetch aid to take you. We will go together, and, though the way be hard, as Kalin here says, we will win through to the ship and to your home. Fear it not."

Impulsively the girl held out her hand to him, and Polaris bent over it and kissed it.

Through his half-closed, dreaming eyes, Kalin watched them, and smiled; but with a wistful tightening at the corners of his mouth.

THREE days they had rested at the dwelling of the priest, when there came a messenger to the mountain from the Prince Helicon, bidding their attendance at the Judgement House, where the prince would hear more of their strange tales of the world.

In a gorgeous state costume Rose Emer made a brave showing as they set forth for the Judgement House, and beside her strode Polaris in the full garb of a Sardanian noble, his gift from Kalin the priest. In dark blue, edged with bands of white, he was cos-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

umed with his necklace of bear's teeth falling on the broad bosom of his tunic. He carried no weapon openly, but under the skirt of the tunic, in its leather holster, he had belted one of his father's trusty revolvers.

They found the Prince Helicon sitting as they had left him, on his pillared throne, and Morolas and Minos, the tall twin brothers, lolled on their seats of stone at the throne's foot. Several of the Sardanian nobles occupied seats on the dais. A great number of the people were gathered to hear more of the tales of the strangers.

Many tales of the world Polaris told them, turning often to Rose Emer for answers to those questions which his own knowledge did not hold. At length he broached the subject that was uppermost in his mind, that of their departure from the land.

At his mention of going Helicon frowned.

"And thou wilt rashly dare to cross the great deserts of snow in a vain attempt to win back to the world?" he asked.

"In the great desert was I reared, O prince," Polaris answered him. "I fear not its terrors. I must face to the North, and soon—"

"But surely thou wilt not think to expose the lady to the dangers of the path," interrupted the prince. "She will remain in Sardanes, and, if indeed thou shalt come safely to the other side of the snow wastes, perchance her own people will find a means to come and transport her afterward."

"Nay, but she shall not remain here, prince," answered Polaris sharply and steadily. "She, too, wishes to be on the way, and no one may transport her across the bitter wilderness more safely than I, who know how and have the ready means to travel it."

Prince Helicon turned his eyes to Rose Emer. A flush mounted to his cheeks and his eyes glittered as he drank in her loveliness.

"How know I that the lady wishes to be so soon gone?" he asked. "It is in my mind that Helicon, Prince of Sardanes, might persuade her to remain, had I the words to talk to her in her own tongue."

He paused and seemed to consider. Polaris watched him with narrowing eyes, and in his anger would not answer lest he might say too much.

"Now, say thou to the lady," spoke Helicon with sudden decision, "that Helicon offers her the love of a prince and the half of the throne of Sardanes. Tell her, and be sure that thou dost translate aright, and her answer to me also."

POLARIS'S face was clouded, but he turned to Rose and repeated evenly to her the proposal of the prince.

Rose Emer paled and then flushed, and instinctively she rested her hand on the arm of her comrade.

"Say to the Prince Helicon that his words do me great honor, very great honor," she answered; "but I am an American girl, and am lonely for my own home and people. Now we are rested, and I wish to go, no matter what may be the risks. And tell him also that I cannot be his wife, because—because—I already am promised to another."

Under his anger and back of his spirit a cold hand clutched at the heart of the man of the snows, but he turned to the prince and repeated the words of the girl.

Helicon's eyes were bright with anger. "Art altogether sure that thou hast made plain both my words and hers, O stranger?" he cried.

"He doubts my words, lady," said Polaris. "Perhaps you can make him understand."

"I think I can," answered Rose. She fronted the prince, and stared him coolly in the face. Then she turned and held out her arms toward the North. Turning again to Helicon, she threw out her right hand, with the palm toward him, in a repellent gesture. "I think you will not misunderstand that, prince," she said in English.

Nor did he. He sprang to his feet and took one step down from the throne.

"Now, by the gods of the gateway," he cried, "thou shalt not so flout Helicon!" All forgetful that she could not understand a word, he raged at the girl. "I say that thou shalt stay in Sardanes as I will, and thy wanderer in strange places shall wander forth without thee, or—"

There Kalin interrupted.

"O prince, think well before thou speakest. Wouldst thou, the prince of great and ancient Sardanes, mate with a woman outlander of whom thou knowest naught? What will thy people think?"

"And, O prince, think well again before thou sayest that which thou canst not recall," broke in Polaris. "For I, Polaris of the Snows, tell thee that this thing shall not be, though thou wert forty times prince. I swear it by no dark portals of the future,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but on the honor of an American gentleman!"

"A truce to thy interfering tongue, priest!" said Helicon furiously. "And thou, man of the wilderness, bridle thy tongue also, lest it be curbed for thee. In Sardanes Helicon is the master."

One of the nobles, a middle-aged man, who had started from his seat, now made himself heard. "O prince," he said anxiously, "I tell thee that Kalin hath the right. It is not meet that thou shouldst take to wife this woman from we know not where, who hath come among us. Let her go, and the man with her, lest harm befall. See, already the people murmur."

It was true. Down in the great hall, where the gathered Sardanians had listened breathless, arose now a babel of voices in protest.

"Garlanes, be thou silent also," said Helicon, but the prince could not turn a deaf ear to the murmurs of the people. He sank back in his seat, and for a space rested his chin on his hand. At length he spoke again in a low, choked voice.

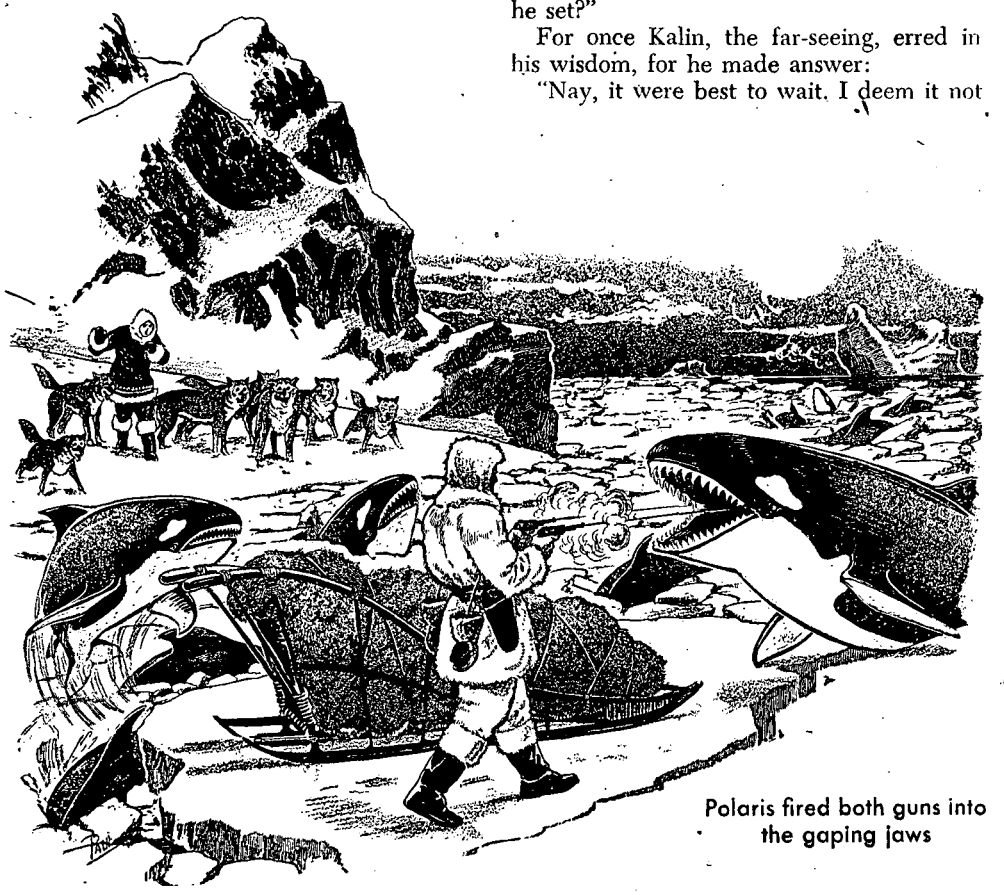
"Not that I fear thee, outlander; nor thee, priest; but it shall be as the people wish. Now get thee gone, thou and the woman. In the time of ten sleeps will Helicon answer thee, after he hath taken counsel with his nobles and his people. Then will he say whether thou shalt go or stay. Go hence until that time and abide in peace with Kalin."

As the Sardanians measured time by sleeping and waking, and not by days, in a land where the days were six months long, it would be ten ordinary days until the prince made his decision.

On their way back to the Gateway to the Future, Polaris said to Kalin: "Now what shall hinder that I be gone before the time he set?"

For once Kalin, the far-seeing, erred in his wisdom, for he made answer:

"Nay, it were best to wait. I deem it not



Polaris fired both guns into the gaping jaws

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

unlikely that the prince will act in despite of the wishes of the nobles and of the people. In any case, he is a faithful man, and no harm will come to thee in the time he hath named."

CHAPTER XIII

POLARIS HUNTS THE BEAR

NEITHER Polaris nor the girl was contented to rest all the hours away on the grassy terraces of the gateway, but wandered together through the valley, learning more of its wonders. Everywhere they found industry. Men and women worked in their little farm plots and vineyards, tending the fruits and grains in which the valley was rich; many of them akin to those known in the outside world, and others which would have made a life study for a botanist.

In all Sardanes the work was so apportioned that the products of the soil and of the craftsman supplied evenly the demands of the valley dwellers. In one section lived and labored the weavers and the dyers of cloths; in another the makers of sandals and articles of leather; and in a roomy stone smithy they found Kard the Smith and his men, the workers in metal, beating out buckles and jewelry, daggers, spears, and implements of many other uses.

Not many of the smiths were necessary, for the metal in which they worked was of incredible hardness and durability, and was tempered by the smiths to a fineness beyond any steel. It was that which had first attracted the attention of Polaris in the Hunter's Road, when he found the dagger of Kard gleaming in the snowpath. Ilium it was named, and it was mined from the volcanic rock far up in the mountainside.

Other metals were found in the rocks, but none of a quality to compare with ilium, or none that had its iridescent beauty.

Gems they also knew, and many an ornament worn by the Sardanian men and maids flashed with bright stones. One variety, of a wonderful rich, red luster, Rose Emer thought were rubies, but she was not enough versed in gem learning to be sure. If they were rubies, they were of immense value, for they were of large sizes, and most of them were flawless to their depths.

On the wall in the library of Kalin the priest hung a necklace of such, containing a full score of magnificent stones, each of many carats weight, fairly well cut into facets by the Sardanian lapidaries who had fashioned them. Each stone was set in a ring of the glittering ilium, attached one to another with links of the metal.

One innovation the strangers took into the valley that was hailed with acclaim. Until the advent of Polaris and Rose Emer not a button was known in the length of the land. Everything sartorial was fastened with buckles.

Sardanian craftsmen and housewives were quick to note the uses of the perforated disks, and buttons were straightaway the new fashion, and were sewn on all garments. When enough were placed to answer their purpose of holding things together still more were added for ornament, until some of the Sardanian robes bore no distant likeness to the creations of a Parisian modiste, with their rows of holeless buttons.

ON THE fifth day after their interview with the Prince Helicon, Kard the Smith came to the gateway to repay their visit, and to bring an invitation to Polaris to go out with a party of the hunters along the Hunters' Road to the edge of the wilderness to hunt the white bear.

Six Sardanians made up the hunting-party, of whom two were Kard the Smith and Morolas, one of the tall brothers of Helicon. All were armed with spears tipped with ilium blades, axes, and daggers, and they drove with them a four-pony sledge, with which to take home their game.

Much as Polaris would have liked to take with him the seven dogs, he did not, for he dared not risk the lives of the animals in the fierce sport. With the death of his dogs would die also his last chances of winning back on the way to the North.

Some hours along the snow-path they discovered the first signs of the game which they sought, the white bear. The sledge was halted and the ponies outspanned. One of the Sardanian hunters was left to keep the camp, and the rest of the party set out on the fresh trail.

Less than a mile away across the snow hummocks they came in sight of their quarry, a magnificent specimen of the king of the pole lands, sleek and fat and powerful from the good feeding he had found in the temperate vicinity of the smoky hills.

"There is the bear. Now, stranger of the snows, how dost thou take him?" said Mo-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rolas. "I understand that thou hast taken many of his kind single-handed—unless indeed that necklace of thine was plucked from dead bones."

Paying no attention whatever to the open sneer in the words of the prince, Polaris made his preparation. He was too much pleased with the prospect of the action before him to be nettled by the peevishness of the Sardanian prince. Smilingly he loosened the long knife in his belt, took a firm grip of his spear, one of his own steel-bladed shafts, and crept forward across the snows where the monster awaited the coming of the foe.

For the bear had seen them, and paused, grumbling and sniffing, to discover if these new animals might not be worth his trouble as a meal.

PLENTY of temper had that bear. Before the man was within thirty feet of him he stopped the slow swaying of his massive head, emitted a snarling roar, and charged. Polaris stood at the dip of a slope in the snow, alert and watchful for his chance to leap and thrust.

As the avalanche of angry bear dashed down the incline its claws slipped on an icy crusting, and it rolled, folding its head in almost to its belly, like a huge snowball, scratching furiously at the snow crust to stop itself and regain its footing.

Straight at the man it shot, and as it reached him he sprang aside.

The same mischance that had upset the animal now proved the undoing of the man's well-aimed thrust. As he drew back his arm to strike, Polaris felt his feet flying from under him.

By exercising all of his tigerish agility he prevented himself from rolling right under the ponderous body of his antagonist. Backward he threw himself, struck a softer spot in the snow crust, and disappeared in it up to his shoulders.

Had Bruin stopped to consider his predicament, that would have been a tight situation for Polaris; but the enraged mountain of flesh paid no further attention to him. Instead he scrambled to his feet at the foot of the slope, snarling more viciously than ever because of his downfall, and charged on into the group of Sardanians.

Before they could realize what was happening, and that Polaris had failed to wound or turn the animal, he was upon them. They scattered, thrusting their spears as they leaped from the path of the monster.

One of them, Kard the Smith, was not so fortunate as the rest. He stood directly in the path of the charge. As he leaped to one side a huge paw whirled in the air and one of the curved talons caught in the slack of his rough tunic, hurling him down as a mouse is spun from the claw of a cat. Before his companions could return to his aid the bear was tearing at the prostrate body of the smith.

As soon as he fell through the snow crust Polaris threw himself forward on his face along the surface, seeking a spot that would allow him to stand upright. In an instant he was on his feet and forward in the wake of the furious bear. His spear had fallen from his hand when he broke into the soft snow, and had glided away over the glary crust for many feet. There was no time to regain it if he was to aid Kard. Plucking the knife from his belt, he rushed in.

Seeming to sense the new danger, the bear whirled on its haunches, and, holding the body of the Sardanian beneath it with one forepaw, struck out madly at Polaris with the other.

Polaris evaded the sweep of the blow by the smallest margin. He had thrown off his gloves, and he caught the long hair on the flail-like paw with his left hand. As the bear drew in his paw to deliver another buffet, the man came with it.

Never in all his bear fights had he come to grips with one of the antarctic monarchs from the front in this wise; but there was no help for it if he would save the smith. He was swept in against the wide chest of the animal, and its terrible front paws were closed to crush him as it raised one armed hind leg to rip him with its down-stroke, and at the same time strove to bend its head down and tear with its jaws.

Menaced by the triple attack, Polaris threw his left arm over his head and jammed his elbow into the throat of the bear below the angle of its jaw, thrusting upward with all the power of his body. At the same instant, quick as a wrestler, he passed one leg over the rising hind leg of the bear.

For the space of an eye flicker the two stood, statuesque, in the snow. Then the man jerked back his shoulders, raised his right arm, and buried the long knife in the white throat.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Twice he stabbed home, and, feeling the clutching forepaws slacken, let himself go limp, slid from the embrace of the bear, and sprawled in the snow alongside the smith. He seized Kard, and with him rolled from under the toppling, roaring mass of the enemy, which floundered in the snow.

It was the end for the bear, however. Tearing in agony at its wounded throat, it reared again and fell backward, struggling terribly in the release of life.

All had happened in a matter of seconds. Kard, snatched from the very jaws of death, stood gaping at the dying bear, unhurt aside from a bad scare. Beside him, Polaris, his white surcoat streaked with blood, stooped and cleaned his knife in the snow. The other Sardanians trooped back somewhat sheepishly, all of them eyeing Polaris with manifest admiration—all save Morolas, whose face was flushed, and in whose eye was an ugly glint of anger or annoyance.

"Methinks thou wert somewhat late, stranger," he growled, "and nearly was Kard gathered to his fathers because of thy clumsiness."

In the face of the facts, the futility of his remark caused Polaris to laugh aloud. "In second thought I left him to thee, prince," he said, "and did but take up the matter again when I saw thee otherwise occupied."

Morolas framed a hot retort, but thought better of it and swallowed it unsaid. "Methinks thy laughter ill-timed," he muttered grimly to himself. But Kard without a word seized the hand of Polaris, and bent and kissed it. Morolas frowned the more.

Polaris recovered his spear. With thongs the five men dragged the huge carcass of the bear back to where they had left the pony sledge, and loaded it on the sledge.

ONE more bear they met that day, much smaller than the first. It was dispatched easily by the party, who bore it down with their spears. In that conflict the honors fell more to the share of Morolas, and that seemed partially to restore his temper.

In Morolas dwelt a wild and unpleasant spirit, unbridled by the discipline with which Helicon, the prince, controlled himself, and in direct contrast to the sunny soul of his twin brother, Minos, known in Sardanes as the "open-handed."

Presently they returned to the sledge, packed on it the carcass of the second bear, and made ready for their return to the city.

Polaris laid aside his long spear and bent himself to the task of making fast the bulky corpses of their quarry. Where there was work afoot he was never backward. Indeed, in the long, weary years of their lonely life, work and study were all that had kept wholesome the minds and bodies of himself and his father.

While he bent to make fast the last knot the other Sardanians drew away from the sledge. He heard a scuffling in the snow and a sharp cry from Kard the Smith— "It shall not be, Morolas!" followed by a snap like a breaking stick.

Between his left arm and his body a flash of light darted as the sun's rays glittered on the ilium tip of a hurled spear, and the weapon was buried in the side of the carcass which he had been making fast.

He whirled on his heel. Morolas stood with his body still bowed and outstretched arm as he had cast the spear. Kard had sprung in between, and it was his weapon with which he had struck that of the prince that had sounded like a breaking shaft. He had spoiled the aim of Morolas, and surely saved the life of Polaris.

Back of the prince stood the other four hunters with weapons poised.

CHAPTER XIV

FOR THE ROSE OF AMERICA

"I TELL thee, prince, it shall not be!" shouted Kard hoarsely. "He hath saved this day the life of Kard, and he shall not die thus. Look to thyself, thou man of the snows," he flung over his shoulder, "thy death waits!"

"Away, fool!" raged Morolas, and whirled the smith from his path with a sweep of his arm. He snatched a spear from one of the hunters, and would have repeated his cast.

That throw was never made.

All had happened in the space that a man might count ten. In one glance Polaris accepted the situation. His head shot forward, every muscle in his body flexed, his face hardened and under his white-furred frontlet his tawny eyes blazed like molten brass. He leaped from the side of the sledge with lightning swiftness, cleared the space intervening with a single bound, and tore the lifted spear from the hand of Morolas. He threw the weapon on the ground, and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for an instant the two men faced each other, foot to foot and eye to eye.

Neither spoke. From his superior height the prince glared down at the son of the snows.

With a motion so quick that the eye could not follow the blow, Polaris struck, from the shoulder and with doubled fist. The tall prince crumpled and went down, hurled fully his own length by the fierceness of the blow.

He never moved again. The fist of Polaris, impelled by all the mighty strength stored in his muscles of steel, had struck Morolas full on the breast-bone. Such was the power of the stroke that the man's chest had caved in before it, and his heart had stopped.

He lay scarcely twitching, and the dark blood welled from his lips and stained the white snow.

Never before had Polaris struck a man in anger with his naked hand, and he was momentarily shaken by the result of his own blow. He hesitated but an instant, however, for his blood was up. A Sardanian hunter knelt in the snow by his dead master.

"Gone is Morolas, brother to Helicon the prince," he wailed, and sprang to his feet gnashing his teeth in fury. Kard cried aloud in horror, but he leaped to the side of Polaris, to confront the four hunters. But he struck no blow in defense of his friend; an ilium blade cast by one of the hunters pierced him as he raised spear; and he, too, fell in the snow.

Across Kard's writhing body and the still corpse of Morolas the Prince, leaped Polaris. The four hunters stood in a little group, he who had thrown the spear at Kard slightly in advance of the others.

That fact alone saved the life of Polaris. Before the unarmed hunter could spring aside and give his comrades space in which to throw, the man of the snows was upon them, a death-dealing fury. He caught the first man by the shoulders, and by sheer strength swung him from the ground and dashed him against his fellows. Head-on, he threw the hunter, and the skull of the flying man crashed against the head of the man next him with sickening force.

Only two antagonists were left to confront him.

An ilium spear swished past his head. He caught it out of the air, and the man who had cast it died with it in his heart. Those Sardanians were of fighting stock; the single remaining man gave back never a step. His spear had been shaken from his hand, but he carried an ilium ax in his belt, and this he whirled up to meet Polaris.

It fell upon thin air. The son of the wilds crouched under its swing like a trained boxer, came up with the Sardanian's guard, and struck once with his long-bladed knife.

The battle was finished. The trampled snow looked like a butcher's shambles.

Polaris stood with clenched hands, his face set like a stone. Under other circumstances he might have felt remorse; he certainly would have been moved to mercy. But he had been trapped like an animal, and he joyed in the fierceness of the conflict, and felt no sting of regret for the men he had slain.

A voice called his name weakly from be-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hind. He turned and beheld Kard the Smith, not yet sped. He had dragged himself to his knees, and was clutching at the great spear that was set in his side.

"Polaris of the Snows," he gasped, "Kard dies for thee, who this day saved Kard from the beast. Kard dies a traitor—to Sardanes's prince. Haste thee—stranger—get thy strange snow runners—get them—from Kalin! Methinks the priest loves thee. He will aid thee—to escape. Go—Helicon holds the Rose. Go—whilst thou mayest. Helicon planned—that thou—shouldst die—this day—but—one Kard—turned traitor. Farewell!"

POLARIS knelt in the red snow and supported the body of the dying smith. Twice the Sardanian essayed to speak again and could not. His head rolled back, and he, too, was sped.

A strange sight was Polaris as he stood up from the corpse of Kard, his white fur surcoat besprinkled with the blood of men and beasts, his handsome face scarred by his terrible anger, his tawny eyes blazing and his broad chest rising and falling in gasps, as cold fear and hot wrath beset him together.

If he had ever doubted his love for the girl so strangely met, the griping fear that strangled his heart and choked his throat put all doubt to flight.

"Helicon holds the Rose," he muttered through his whitened lips. "What saidst thou, Kard? That I must escape? Nay, Kard; death shall find me in thy valley of Sardanes, or I shall find Helicon, thy prince, and the Rose. Yesterday, or was it many yesterdays agone?—it was all for the North. Now it is all for the Rose. I come, dear heart; I come, to win, or to die in the losing!"

He leaped to the sledge, tore away the thongs that bound the carcasses of the dead bears and rolled them into the snow alongside the dead men. He inspanned the four horses, sprang into the driver's seat, shook out the many-molded lash and drove back toward Sardanes, as though hell's door had opened and loosed its legion of furies along the Hunters' Road behind him.

Midway in his dash to the city he halted the horses and sprang down. With nose well down to catch the scent from the trail, and with his plumed tail aflaunt as he galloped, a great gray dog toiled out through the snows to meet him.

"What, Marcus? You, too, have fought and bled!" he cried, as his loyal servant leaped upon him, whining for the joy of the meeting. The shoulder of the dog was gashed by a keen edge, so that his blood had run down and dried on his breast and legs. And on the throat and jowl of Marcus was other blood.

"Now, do you alone live of all your tribe, Marcus? Shame on you, Marcus, if you deserted to find your master while the fighting pack died for the Rose! Or did it fall some other way that you alone come to meet me?"

Wondering much and fearing more, he flung the dog onto the sledge and again lashed the ponies into a mad run. Snow fell, and they dashed on through the storm, the man ever plying the long lash, the dog riding behind him, reared, and with his paws on the man's shoulders, both looking ahead, where the smoke curled around the mighty mountain-tops.

When they came to the pass gashed in the foothills, where the snow waves broke at the lips of the warm slopes, Polaris outspanned the outworn ponies, and dismissed them with a parting crack of the long whip. Freed of their burdens, the tired little beasts scuttled away up the rocky hillsides, betaking themselves to soft pastures, to forget the voice of the lash and the galling harness.

Polaris and Marcus climbed the pass, and stood again at the brink of the ledge of rock that overlooked the valley. Below them in the sunshine lay Sardanes, never more peaceful. Men were working in the fields, women singing from the homes and children were at play in the meadows. Under its green bridges the little river rippled to the hill's foot, its waterfall murmuring from the distance.

Above it all, for an instant, Polaris stood gazing down, with no peace of spirit, his heart and brain a red and raging fury. Sardanes's evil genius was at her gates.

Through the forests to the left the man and dog skirted the meadows where none might see them, headed straight to the terraced declivity of the Gateway to the Future. None was there to meet them as they set foot on the last terrace and the house of the priest lay before them; but a welcome sound greeted the ears of Polaris. It was the howling of the dogs, which Marcus would have answered. A stern word silenced him.

At the very threshold of the house of Kalin, the priest met Polaris. His face was

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drawn and anxious and his right hand was bound in a white bandage. At sight of the son of the snows and his gray bodyguard, Kalin started and a strange look passed athwart his melancholy features.

Without setting foot on the door-stone, Polaris called sternly: "Greeting to thee, Kalin the Priest. Tell me, and waste not thy words in the telling, where fares the Rose?"

Kalin threw forth his uninjured hand in a bitter gesture. "The Prince Helicon—" he answered hoarsely, but Polaris broke in:

"Ay, priest, Helicon holds the Rose. I learned as much but shortly. Now if there has been treachery here, I am minded that Marcus shall tear out a traitor's throat! Speak quickly. How falls it that the Rose is gone, that the prince breaks faith and that thou hast allowed it?"

UNMOVED by the threat, Kalin bent his deep eyes on Polaris.

"No traitor dwells here," he answered. "Even now those faithful to me in the valley gather to the rescue of the lady, it may be, though it rend Sardanes with bitter strife. Ay, all that would Kalin attempt, even though he deemed that thou wert dead in the snows, as Helicon hinted. Helicon hath not had his will freely. A priest of Hephaistos lieth yonder in his dwelling with a broken shoulder, and this hand was injured in defense of the Rose. Kalin did but yield to force, that he might later win by craft. Thy words do Kalin small honor, thou who are as the brother of Kalin."

"Thy pardon, Kalin, my words were rash. Consider that the maid is dearer to me than aught I may hope to attain in the world, and this thing that hath been done hath brought upon me a rage like unto nothing I have ever known. Now tell me what thou mayest accomplish in my aid, for I go hence to find Helicon the Prince."

"Mine is half of the fault, brother," Kalin answered. "I should have foreseen, but I guessed not that Helicon was mad enough for this. Wide was the rift between us before; it hath passed all bridging now. As I have said, many of the people hold to the ancient sway of the priesthood of Hephaistos, and murmur at the changes which Helicon would have. Already my messengers are among them, calling them to my aid. Hadst thou not come, in a short space Kalin would have been on his way to the Judgement House. It was ordered that thou shouldst die this day on the Hunters' Road. How hast thou won free?"

"Kard the Smith owed me somewhat, and could not stomach my killing. He took a dead thrust for his hindrance. Yet did he warn in time, and Morolas and four hunters keep him company whither he traveleth," Polaris answered simply.

Then Kalin told him how Helicon the Prince had come to the gateway and taken Rose Emer thence by force. Kalin had made opposition, even to raising his hand against the prince. In a scuffle, wherein he was supported by one of his priests, he had been wounded in the hand by the dagger of the prince, and the priest had been hurled to the ground, so that his shoulder was cracked.

"Only we two were here to oppose him," said Kalin, "and he had others with him. Had I persisted, I had been slain by him in his fury. So I submitted that I might be left to befriend the Rose. And she, she loosed the great dog before she was taken, and set him forth on thy trail. One of Helicon's men gashed him with a spear, and he would have turned and given battle to all of them, but Rose urged him on."

"And how went the Rose—calmly, or struggling and crying?" asked Polaris, his jaws clinching at the thoughts called up by the words of Kalin.

"Nay, with head held high, tearless and saying nothing went the Rose," the priest answered him. "The lady hath greatness of spirit. She went in anger, but gave not way to fear."

"Now we go to visit this prince of thine," said Polaris. He called Marcus and shut the dog, protesting, with his fellows in the stable. "Well would you like the fight with me, if fight there is to be, I know, my Marcus, but I dare not risk you," he muttered.

He ran to his room in the house of the priest. When he came forth there swung from his waist his father's brace of heavy revolvers and the filled cartridge belt, and in his hand he bore the brown rifle. He had also an ilium-bladed spear, and in its sheath at his hip gleamed the long dagger of Kard the Smith, that he had taken from the corpse of the stout Sardanian.

He counted much on his firearms now. Here were weapons of which even Kalin knew not the secret.

Among the few books in the cabin of his father was one which Polaris had read and reread, and which, as boy and man, he had

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

liked best of them all. It was the "Ivanhoe" of Sir Walter Scott. He had wondered much on its story of chivalry and battle in a far-off time. Unconsciously much of his own language was couched in its quaint terms.

Now, as he set forth, to fight, or to fall, if need be, for the lady of his heart, there came to him a strange conceit, born of the old romance.

Armed and ready, he stood at the top of the terrace, and while the priest wondered, he raised his voice in his own tongue, not loudly, but firmly and clearly, in the first battle cry ever heard in the valley of Sardanes:

"For the Rose of America! Polaris to the rescue!"

Together he and Kalin passed down the terraced slopes of the Gateway to the Future.

CHAPTER XV

HEPHAISTOS CLAIMS A SACRIFICE

KALIN carried a bundle in his hand, and as they reached the thickets at the foot of the hill he paused.

"Now, for our purpose thou must go unknown of men. Thou canst hide thyself in one of these."

He shook out his bundle, and revealed two of the long sable robes of his priestly order. He threw one of them over Polaris and donned the other. They were loose and cowled, and covered both men entirely.

"As a priest of Hephaistos thou goest," said Kalin. "Thou must leave the spear, but that strange club of thine thou mayest hide beneath the robe."

"Nay, I can take the spear also," answered Polaris, and snapped the stout shaft off short in his hands, so that the weapon was rendered little longer than the rifle, and he could hide both of them under the garment.

"Priest," he said, as they started across the meadows toward the bridge, "but shortly I said that in anger which I fain would recall, for twice thou hast shown thyself a true man."

Kalin waved his hand deprecatingly. "It is forgotten, as though it were not," he said with one of his rare and melancholy smiles "Thou art as my brother."

"But now," persisted Polaris, "we fare on an errand to which thy feeling of brotherhood doth not bind thee. Why goest thou into danger with me, Kalin, into danger that may end in death, thou, who art of this land, and its priest?"

Kalin halted and regarded him strangely. "Say, thou, Polaris, thou lovest Rose?" he questioned. Into the face of the man of the snows the red blood flamed afresh.

"Ay, so it seemeth—unto death," he said simply.

The priest nodded slowly. "And the Rose—doth she return thy love, my brother?" he asked.

Then was Polaris silent for a long moment. "Nay," he answered at length. "Nay, Kalin, the love of the Rose is not mine. Somewhat I have guessed, and the rest her own words have made plain. There is a man—a brave American—" the words cost him an effort, "whom she loveth, and whom she will wed. He leadeth the party with which she came hither. He fareth forth on a dangerous quest, to return in honor and greatness to his own land—and the Rose—" He stopped.

Again Kalin looked strangely into his eyes. "And to save her for another thou darest all, even to thy life?"

"Ay, the man is worthy. And that she loveth me not, should my love for her be less that I should falter in her service? No, Kalin, that is not the way of Polaris," answered the son of the snows.

"And when thou hast won her way home, as I think thou wilt—for thou darest all things, and the high gods love those greatly daring—what then?"

"I have a duty laid on me, in the far North; and then— I know not."

Once again his strange smile passed over the face of Kalin the priest. "Now, thou Polaris, we indeed are brothers in all. Know that I, too, love the Rose, and would die even as thou wouldst, to save her, even to save her for another—but I had hoped that the other might be thee—I dearly hoped it. Nor that it may not be, lesseneth not the measure of the service of Kalin."

Polaris held out his hand, and his eyes were very bright as their fingers clasped.

"Kalin, my brother, may the gods set our feet in the same path, wherever it leadeth," he said.

As they proceeded toward the Judgment House they saw that many Sardanians were gathered there, and ever among the throng passed back and forth the black-robed figures of the priests of the gateway.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kalin stationed Polaris by a pillar in the great hall, not far from the platform.

"Stay thou there, brother, and be silent, unless great need cometh," he said, and passed up the steps to his black stone seat near the throne.

A friendly murmur arose from the Sardanians in the hall when they saw the priest throw aside his robe and take his seat. That something untoward was on foot it was easy to guess. All over the hall, the voices of men were raised in discussion, and chiming with them the voices of women also. And ever from group to group passed the priests of Kalin, exhorting here and rebuking there, setting the stage for the denouément planned by their master.

PRESENTLY entered Garlanes and a group of Sardanian nobles, among whom towered Minos, the brother of the prince—Minos, whose twin brother lay stiffening in the snow in the Hunters' Road. Then, after some delay, came Helicon himself.

As the prince ascended the steps to his throne, Polaris leaned forward from his sheltering pillar, his whole frame taut as a bowstring, the hand that held the brown rifle clenched so that it seemed that the steel barrel itself would crumple in his terrible grip.

Helicon's face was darkly clouded. He did not glance once in the direction of Kalin, but sat a while in thought, and in all the hall was silence. His musing ended, the prince raised his head.

"Wherefore do the people of Sardanes gather in the Judgment House and summon their ruler?" he asked harshly, and bent his stern gaze on the people below the platform.

None answered him. He smiled grimly, and again he questioned: "What matter would Sardane's people bring before Sardane's prince? Speak."

"Of all the lands in the world," declared Polaris, "America is the greatest—and hath no prince nor king"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

From among the people rose a subdued murmur, a note of protest, but no man was bold enough to voice it. In a silence that followed Helicon sat impatiently, his fingers twitching on the stone arms of his throne.

From his seat Kalin the priest rose and stepped to the foot of the throne.

"Thy people murmur because of a deed that to them seemeth ill, Helicon the Prince," he said. He paused, and behind him in the hall rose another murmur of support from the people.

"They are assembled in the Judgment House to beg that Helicon the Prince shall sit in judgment on himself and render answer," continued Kalin. "Thy people murmur because thou wouldst take to wife an alien woman and place her with thee on the throne of Sardanes, supplanting the right of a daughter of Sardanes.

"They murmur," the priest raised his voice slightly, in a note of accusation, "because thou hast reft her from the hospitality of Sardane's priest with violence, under a broken pledge, and that thou hast lifted thy hand against the priests of Sardanes, the ministers of the mighty Lord Hephaistos of the Gateway, who speak the word of Hephaistos in Sardanes—"

"Enough, priest!" shouted Helicon, red with rage. "Cease thy slander of Sardane's ruler!" He turned his eyes on the Sardanians in the hall. "Helicon, Prince of Sardanes, rendereth account to no man," he cried. "It is his will that he weddeth with the Rose maiden. Let the man who gainsaith look to himself!"

As the voices of the people were raised in an angry babel of protest, he lifted his hand.

"Beware," he cried, his voice ringing through the hall. "Take warning! Helicon rules in Sardanes. Bitter shall be the punishment meted out to him that opposeth the will of the prince."

Before his fierce eyes the people fell silent again, and he turned again to Kalin.

"As for thee, priest," he said hoarsely, "get thee back with thy black-robed crew, to thy station, and attend thy priestly duties. Attend them well. Too long hath thy priesthood interfered in the affairs of Sardanes. It shall be so no longer. Go, ere I am moved to lessen thy number by one meddler!"

He glared at the priest, and men in the hall stood all aghast at his words. Many there were of the priest's party, but they knew that many others were for the prince and against the priest, and none knew to what lengths Helicon might go in his anger.

STILL at the foot of the throne Kalin stood undaunted, and holding his last card in the game. A bitter smile came to his lips, and his voice was low and deep as he answered:

"Prince, thou growest mad, who would override the will of thy people and dare the anger of the god. It is the will of the god, as it is the will of the people that thou shalt wed a maid of Sardanes."

Assuming for his own purposes that he was unaware of the fate which had been intended for Polaris, he continued:

"When the stranger with whom the maid came hither returneth from the hunt, then he shall take her and fare again to the north, as they wish—"

Helicon, secretly worried because of the long absence of Morolas and his party, yet not dreaming of the end of their mission, broke in again.

"The stranger cometh not again to Sardanes. He hath left the maid, and fared alone on his road to the north. I will wed the maid. I, Helicon, have said it, and it shall be."

"Have thy hunters then returned?" asked Kalin pointedly.

"Be thou silent, priest!" roared Helicon. Another thought flashed into his mind. "Tarry thou here, for there shall be work for thee." He turned to his brother Minos. "Go thou and fetch the Rose maid hither," he said.

Kalin stood back with folded arms, his head held high. In all the hall was no sound, save the suppressed breathing of the people. Smiling, as was his wont, the tall Minos left the hall through the pillared entrance behind the throne. Helicon sat glowering, with his chin on his hand, until he heard Minos returning.

Then he sprang to his feet and stepped from the throne to the floor of the platform, fronting Kalin.

Minos and Rose Emer came into the hall. The girl's face was white, but she did not falter as she advanced with Minos and stood near Helicon. Only once her face lighted as she saw Kalin; then she turned her eyes, and through the pillared façade of the Judgment House she scanned anxiously the reaches of the valley.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The heart of Polaris bounded as, crouched behind his pillar, he followed the course of that gaze. She was looking for him to return —he would not fail her!

"Now, whether it be the will of the god or of the people, or of the maid herself, I, Helicon, will wed the Rose," said the prince shortly. "And thou, Kalin, of whom and of whose pratings I tire sadly, thou art still priest in Sardanes—thou shalt wed us—now! Proceed!"

An enigmatical smile overspread the face of the priest. Full in the eyes of the angry prince he looked as he towered scarce a yard away.

"Thou goest far in thy folly, Helicon," he said, and there was a note of pity in his low tones. Then he raised his voice. "I wed thee not, nor shall such a marriage ever be!"

Helicon hissed a direction into the ear of Minos, and the tall prince, still smiling, stepped toward the edge of the platform and fronted the people in the lower section of the hall with dagger drawn and spear aloft. Helicon snatched his own ilium blade from his girdle and leaped on Kalin.

He caught the priest by the shoulder, and sought to crush him to his knees; but, great as was his strength, he could not bend the wiry form to his will. Kalin stood firm.

One searching glance he sent down the hall, where men were shouting and urging forward, and where the foremost were held back by the menace of Minos. Then the priest turned his gaze back to the face of Helicon.

Up flashed the bright blade in the hand of the prince and quivered over the heart of Kalin. "Choose, priest; choose or die!" he shouted hoarsely. "Wed Helicon to the Rose and go hence, or refuse and perish—and thy religion shall give way to a better!"

"Strike, fool, and thou darest," said Kalin contemptuously, and lifted no hand to save himself.

Along the the great arm of the prince the muscles tightened. The blade came flashing down. Midway in his stroke Helicon shuddered. The knife clattered on the stone floor. A crashing roar reverberated through the judgment chamber, and a cloud of dark smoke floated upward.

Helicon crashed down on his back with widespread arms—dead!

A groan of awe rose in the hall. Everywhere men fell on their knees and covered their faces. Even Kalin, greatly shaken, knelt. Rose Emer swayed where she stood, and stretched out her arms with a glad cry of "Polaris!"

With his cowl thrown back from his golden head and his topaz eyes flaming, Polaris strode onto the platform. Under the black robe he clutched the smoking rifle.

CHAPTER XVI

HEPHAISTOS HATH SPOKEN

FROM his hiding-place behind the pillar Polaris had watched and listened, leaving matters to the diplomacy of Kalin, hoping against hope that the priest might persuade Helicon from his blind desires. When he realized that the priest had failed he had crept forward from pillar to pillar up the hall.

While all men watched tensely the scene on the platform, and none noted him, he had swung himself up on the dais, and stood behind the pillar at its edge, watchful and with finger on trigger. Even then he had held his hand until the last second of time that would avail to save his friend.

As he reached her side, Rose Emer collapsed with a shuddering cry, and he caught her swooning body with his left arm.

Of all the Sardanians, Kalin was first to command himself. Kalin, the quick-witted, alone guessed that his aid came not from the god of his people, although for a moment he, too, had bowed before what had seemed to him the supernatural. He remembered the strangely fashioned "club" which Polaris had borne from the mountain, and turned it to his purposes.

Without rising from his knees he tossed his hands above his head and cried out:

"The voice of the god hath spoken! I thank thee, Lord Hephaistos! Thou hast upheld thy servant."

Sardanians heard the words of their priest, and they believed. Nor were Sardanian nerves stout enough to withstand such a startling manifestation of the deity. With one accord the people broke from the hall like sheep, and the nobles fled from one pat-form. Even the sable-robed priests tarried not for another greeting from their god, but scurried away with the rest.

Only one man fled not. That was the great Prince Minos, now ruler of Sardanes. From where he had knelt at the edge of the dais he arose and came, smiling no longer, to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where his brother lay, and knelt again with bowed head, paying heed to naught else; for Minos had loved his brother.

With a silent gesture Kalin bade Polaris accompany him.

Rose Emer still lay limp in his arms. He lifted her like an infant and followed the priest. Back to the Gateway to the Future they went without pausing; nor did they in all of the way thither encounter a single Sardanian. The wrath of Hephaistos was abroad in the land, and his people prayed in their homes.

Far ahead of them hurried the little band of Kalin's priests, and climbed the mountainside to their temple. None looked back.

Polaris handed the rifle and the spear to Kalin, that he might the more easily carry the girl. As they proceeded he explained to the priest the agency which had saved him and slain the prince.

"And in this tube lieth a death that striketh at a distance?" said the priest curiously. "Well, brother, thou hast paid the score that lay between us, and the score also that lay between the twain of us and Prince Helicon. Truly, it was an ill day for Sardane's prince when Kard brought thee and the Rose maid into the valley."

"For one purpose only have I killed," said Polaris solemnly. "The deaths of the men I have slain may not be counted against me. Gladly would I have gone hence without bloodshed, but they stood blind to justice. I take the Rose safely from Sardanes again —peacefully, if may be—but I take her, though it cost the lives of a hundred men."

Shortly after they had crossed the river the girl's senses returned to her, and she had opened her eyes for a brief instant, and had then closed them again.

Softly she lay in the arms of the young giant who carried her so easily. Very close to hers was his handsome face. Very far away and faint was the face of the American captain. Unconsciously she nestled closer in the strong arms, and on his broad shoulder her head turned closer to his.

POLARIS fought a conflict, short and sharp, as he carried Rose Emer up the terraced slopes of the Gateway to the Future. It was a battle fiercer by far than any that he had waged with the Sardanians, and within himself were both the friend and the foe. With that soft, warm, yielding body in his arms, the dear, proud little head at rest on his shoulder, with the perfume of her hair in his nostrils, with her whole ineffable attraction lying about him, never stronger than now, like the meshes of a magic net, Polaris was going quite mad.

Lower and nearer he bent his head. Kalin, unseeing, stalked on ahead. Nearer yet. The perfumed hair brushed his cheek.

Wild thoughts crowded one another through his brain. Why should he face the long, hard way to the north? Was there not here a kingdom ready to a strong hand—to his hand, with the aid of the priest? Youth, a kingdom to take for a little fighting, and the queen of his heart to queen it in the kingdom—what more in reason might any man ask?

Lower yet his head bent as he strode, and wild birth and bitter spirit of the barren years strove in the man's soul with book-learned chivalry and an old man's spoken precepts.

Yet was the end of the struggle a foregone conclusion. A few short days back it would have been different. Despite his strange culture, Polaris had been little better than a barbarian. The impulses in his breast were those of the primal man, and might not for long be fettered by half-learned lessons of the brain. And then came the woman and love. All of the loose strands of his being, although he knew it not, were gathered together and held in one small, soft white hand.

So, ere ever it was fought, his battle was decided.

Her hair brushed his cheek. His head swam dizzily. He knew not if he walked or staggered. Her breath intoxicated him. Their lips met, only a touch, light as the brushing of birds in flight, but it thrilled the man like racing fire.

He started in every affrighted nerve. He dared not know that her lips had answered to his touch. He dared not look at her face, swooned as he believed her. With cheeks aflame, he strode on toward the house of the priest, and did not discover the fiery signal raised in answer to his own.

Dim-eyed, he laid her on the stone bench at the priest's door, while he brought water to dash in her face. But when he came with it he found her recovered and sitting upright, with hands pressed tightly to her face. Covered as he was with his own confusion, he did not notice that which might have

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spared them both much trouble in the days to come.

Following a succession of events which few men in the world could have encountered, the steel-sinewed son of the snows now went on guard at the house of Kalin while the priest and the girl slept, both of them worn from their experiences in the last few hours. When they were refreshed Polaris took his rest, and the priest stood watch. They dared not relax vigilance, and there was none they might trust utterly, except themselves.

They pressed their preparations for their departure from the valley. While Kalin gathered secretly all things needed to their journey, Polaris packed the sledge. He mended his harness with care, and with light, tough wood and thongs constructed extra snow-shoes. He also cleaned and oiled his guns, and selected several stout spears.

Beyond a return from the garb of the Sardanians to the stout clothing she had worn from the outer world, the preparations of Rose Emer were few.

WITHIN twenty-four hours from the time of their return to the mountain from the Judgment House, the storm gathered. Hard as they had labored, they were not more than half finished with their work of preparation for departure when Prince Minos climbed the slopes of the gateway. With him came a file of stout Sardanians. Every man of the party was fully armed.

"Yonder cometh trouble in haste," said Polaris, when he noted the approach of the prince and his men. "Go thou and talk with them, brother," he said to Kalin. "My temper groweth short with these Sardanians of thine; the more so with those of the royal breed. And, brother, should thy parley come to an ill end, wave thy hands and cast thyself on thy face, and I will clear the way before thee," and he patted the brown rifle.

"What is the pleasure of the Prince Minos?" asked Kalin, standing at the top of the terrace path as the prince and his men paused in front of him, where the way grew narrow.

Minos made no answer, gazing sternly on Kalin. Old Garlanes, the noble, spoke.

"No words finds Minos, the prince," he said, "for his tongue is stilled with sorrow—sorrow for the deaths of his brethren and with anger that their slayer goeth unpunished."

Kalin's start of surprise was well simulated. "How mean you, Garlanes?" he exclaimed. "The brethren of the prince—".

"Runners have come in who were sent on the trail of a hunting-party. They report the corpses of Morolas, brother to the prince, and five hunters lying in their blood in the Hunters' Road. Aye, they were done to death with violence, and their bodies damaged by the beasts of the wastes.

"Nor does the Prince Minos"—and Garlanes lowered his voice to a mere whisper—"believe that the death of his brother Helicon came from Sardanes's god. On the corpse of the dead Helicon were found two wounds, from which blood had flowed, and from the mouth of one of them there fell this thing."

Garlanes held out his hand with the leaden pellet of a rifle cartridge in it.

"This thing Minos thinketh not of the Lord Hephaistos, but rather of the stranger

Backache, Leg Pains May Be Danger Sign

Of Tired Kidneys—How to Get Happy Relief

If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills. (ADV.)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

yonder, whom thou harborest. With him, the prince thinketh, thou mayest find others to match this which slew the Prince Helicon. But how he managed to slay Morolas and five other strong men, wounding them all in front, is beyond the power of Minos to guess. And now, O Kalin, he biddeth me say unto you that thou shall render unto us the stranger and the woman, or else we take them by force. Thou wilt give them up to us, or art thou still deluded?"

Kalin raised his hand in a gesture, commanding silence. "Let Kalin ponder on this matter," he said quickly, and bowed his head in thought, while Minos watched him with somber eyes. As he seemed to think the priest turned over and over in his palm the pellet of lead from the rifle of Polaris, and pretended to attach great weight to it.

"Nay, O Minos, my master, and Garlanes, his mouthpiece," said Kalin at length, speaking lowly, so that Polaris might not hear him, "Kalin no longer is blind. He sees that it is even as thou seest. But if these things be true, and the stranger hath power to slay with a noise at a distance, it is likely that his taking will be no easy task, and may cost the lives of many. In anger, or to save himself, he might slay thee, O Minos, and thee, Garlanes."

Deeper grew the frown of Minos. Garlanes shuddered and glanced apprehensively in the direction of Polaris, who sent him a grim and unassuring smile.

"It were better," went on Kalin softly "to leave the matter in the hands of Kalin and of the priests of the gateway. This stranger seemeth to trust us. What many of ye might not accomplish with force may be done by few of us by stealth and cunning. Leave the matter to the servants of Hephaistos. He hath brought dire trouble to Sardanes. For the doing to death of the Prince Helicon and the Prince Morolas and his servants, this stranger from the wilderness of a surety shall die, even though he *did* save the life of Kalin." The voice of the priest became a low hiss. "He and the woman with him shall go through the Gateway to the Future as an offering to the Lord Hephaistos. Kalin hath spoken!"

Minos, the prince, nodded his head slowly. "That were meet, priest," he said, speaking for the first time. "That is the order of Minos. See that it be done, and that quickly; for the blood of my murdered brethren calls to Minos for vengeance. Yes, Kalin, see to it, and much will be forgiven thee of other things wherein Minos hath had caused to doubt."

"When he sleepeth next it shall be done, prince," whispered Kalin.

Minos and his men turned away and descended the terraces, satisfied that the doom of Polaris and the Rose was sealed.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BATTLE IN THE CRATER

FROM the instant that the towering form of Minos disappeared through the shrubbery of the terrace path, the exertions of Polaris and Kalin were redoubled. In a few hours their preparations for the departure into the wastes were complete.

Cautious as they were, they could not be entirely secret in their goings and comings about the mountain, and many a curious priestly eye was cast upon their doings by the servants of Kalin. One of them, a dark-faced rascal by the name of Analos, more prying than the others, soon discovered not only that the sledge of the strangers was being stocked and provisioned to its full capacity, as though for a journey, but the nature of some of the articles packed upon it made him certain that his master Kalin was to make use of them.

Watchful for an opportunity, the priest Analos skirted the plateau and slipped over the edge of the path.

He was as stealthy as a cat, but Polaris saw him go, and caught a glimpse of his face as he disappeared.

"One of thy priests hath slipped away from thee, Kalin," he said. "Methinks he hastened to Minos with a tale to tell."

They went to the brink of the terrace. Far below them Analos was scuttling for the meadows like a scared rabbit, his priestly gown tucked well about his flying legs.

In the small court in the rear of the house Polaris and Kalin finished their work with the sledge and harnessed to it four of the small Sardanian ponies, to drag it up through the spiral way of the Gateway to the Future; for the path which Kalin purposed they should take led straight through the gateway mountain, and was the only path out of the valley, aside from the north pass, through which they had entered.

Just before they started Kalin summoned his priests and bade them farewell, giving

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them his blessing, which they took with bended knees and bowed heads, and several of them sobbing; for they loved Kalin well. His words forestalled words of surprise or of protest.

"Children of Hephaistos, Kalin goeth hence for a time," he said. "Perchance he will return; perchance thou shalt see his face no more. Let none gainsay his going, for it is of the gods. Now, lest the wrath of Minos lie heavily on thee, in suspicion that thou hast aided in the passing of Kalin and the strangers from Sardanes, get thou gone from the gateway to the valley, and spread diligently the report that Kalin and the strange man cast thee forth, in danger of thy lives. Fare thee well."

In a body the priests descended the terraces. As they stood at the top to see them go, Kalin caught the shoulder of Polaris and pointed over toward the white-walled Judgment House. From its pillared façade streamed forth a line of hurrying Sardanians, and the sun shone brightly on the ilium blades.

"Here come Minos and his men," said the priest shortly. "Take thy last look on the valley of Sardanes, and let it be short."

"Farewell, Sardanes—beautiful, horrible Sardanes," breathed Rose Emer. Then she, too, turned to the flight, and shuddered slightly as she turned.

Then into the darkness of the arched portal and up through the spiraled rocky way they urged the laboring ponies. Rose Emer carried two flaming torches to light the gloom of the way, and the two men bent their shoulders to the aid of the animals. Close at their heels slunk the seven dogs of the pack, with hackles erect and eyes glowing in the half dark of the place, the strangeness of which caused them many a misunderstanding whimper. Stoutly the little horses bent to their work, so that it chanced that they dragged the sledge out of the passage and onto the shelf where were the chapels, at the same time that the first of the runners of Minos leaped from the terrace path to the level of the plateau, many feet below the fugitives.

Polaris turned to the right, where the broad ledge curved away past the chapels along the mighty ellipse of the crater.

"Nay, brother, not that way!" called Kalin. "Here lieth the path," and he turned the horses to the left, where the shelf narrowed at the point where was the perch from which Polaris had witnessed the passing of Chloran, Sardon's son.

So close to the brink of the ledge loomed the bulge of the crater wall that there was but the barest room for the passing of the sledge. It required all of the skill and patience of the men to guide the snorting, frightened ponies. One misstep would have whirled the beasts and sledge into the roaring fire-pit below; but they passed the neck of the pathway without mishap, and, after a few yards' progress, found the way widening and more smooth.

SCARCELY had they passed the narrowest of the path when a shout from behind told them that Minos and his men had emerged from the tortuous spiral in the bowels of the cliffside, and had gained the shelf rim. Then Polaris turned back.

"How far on lieth the vent in the wall of the mountain through which we pass?" he asked of Kalin. The priest told him that it was nearly half-way around the circumference of the crater rim. "Then haste thou on, brother," said Polaris. "Get thee well through the last gate. I will turn back and see what may be done to delay those who are in too great haste behind us."

With a word of explanation to the girl, he took several spears and the brown rifle from the sledge.

Kalin smiled at him grimly through the murk.

"Methinks they will try first the broad way, or divide, and follow both paths," he said, "and they who go by the broad way will be fooled, for it cometh to naught but a bridgeless gap yonder." He pointed across the pit. "Those who come this way, hold thou back as long as may be—and then come thou swiftly, brother, and I will show thee means to close the way behind us."

Polaris ran back along the ledge. He came to the path neck again without encountering any of the pursuers, although their voices sounded from just beyond the bulge of the rock. Catching hand and footholds, he swung himself easily to the perch above the path, crept forward, and peered down at the platform.

Like rats from a hole, fully forty Sardanians had crept up through the winding passage. When they saw the light flaring redly before them they charged forward with a shout, expecting to find their quarry; and then they stood gaping in surprise on

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the red emptiness of the platform, where for centuries no Sardanian had stood, save the priests of the god and those about to die.

In front of the chapels they gathered in a group, the fire vapor from the abyss reflected from their staring faces in ghastly fashion. Only Minos, the prince, tarried not to wonder. Swiftly he paced to the right and to the left, inspecting the ledge with quick glances.

"Haste on the track of the strangers!" he cried. "Of old time have I heard it that through the gateway lieth another path from Sardanes to the wastes. It is that to which the false priest guideth them. Yonder seemeth scant room for their sledge. Let us follow here."

He started along the broader way to the right, and his men, overcoming in part their awe of the fearsome pit at their feet, began to follow; albeit with care, and as far from the edge as they might walk.

"Nay, not all of ye!" called back the prince. "Garlanes, go thou with men and explore the narrower way yonder."

With most of the Sardanians trailing at his back, Minos disappeared in the murk beyond the chapels. Garlanes and fifteen men turned to the pursuit of the narrow path. The old noble moved slowly, as though the task to which he was set was little enough to his taste, and none of his men was over hasty.

In silence Polaris watched the advance. He was minded to stay his hand from strife as long as might be, and, if possible, to frighten the pursuers back long enough to give the priest the time needed to thread the pass with the sledge.

With that plan in mind, he prepared to surprise the men of Garlanes when they should come near enough for his purpose. His trained ears, deafened by the noises from the never silent crater pit, did not tell him of a number of slinking forms that sniffed and crouched along the rock wall and came to a halt almost at the foot of the jutting rock where he crouched.

Foremost of the party of Garlanes was a tall young man. It chanced that, without seeing it, he had come to the beginning of the sinister chute in the floorway of the shelf—that polished slide through which all Sardanians were shot to their fiery ends. At his feet, unnoticed in the half light cast by the flicker, lay one of the wooden shield-like vehicles in which the victims rode to death. Ahead of him the man saw that the way grew suddenly narrower.

He paused and peered under his cupped hand.

Out of the gloom ahead of him came suddenly an ear-splitting rattling, followed by a hiss and a weird moaning that caused the hair at the nape of his neck to stiffen. Immediately the place was in echo to a full throated, hideous chorus, that froze the blood in the veins of the boldest Sardanian who heard it.

COWERING, and with staring eyeballs, the members of the searching party saw their leader shaken in his tracks, apparently crumpled up by an unseen force and whirled from them—out over the abyss of fire. One glimpse only they caught of his flying body, dark against the ruddy glow of the steam and smoke from the crater heart. For an instant the great hollow of the funnel rang with his agonized shrieks as he shot downward, and he was gone.

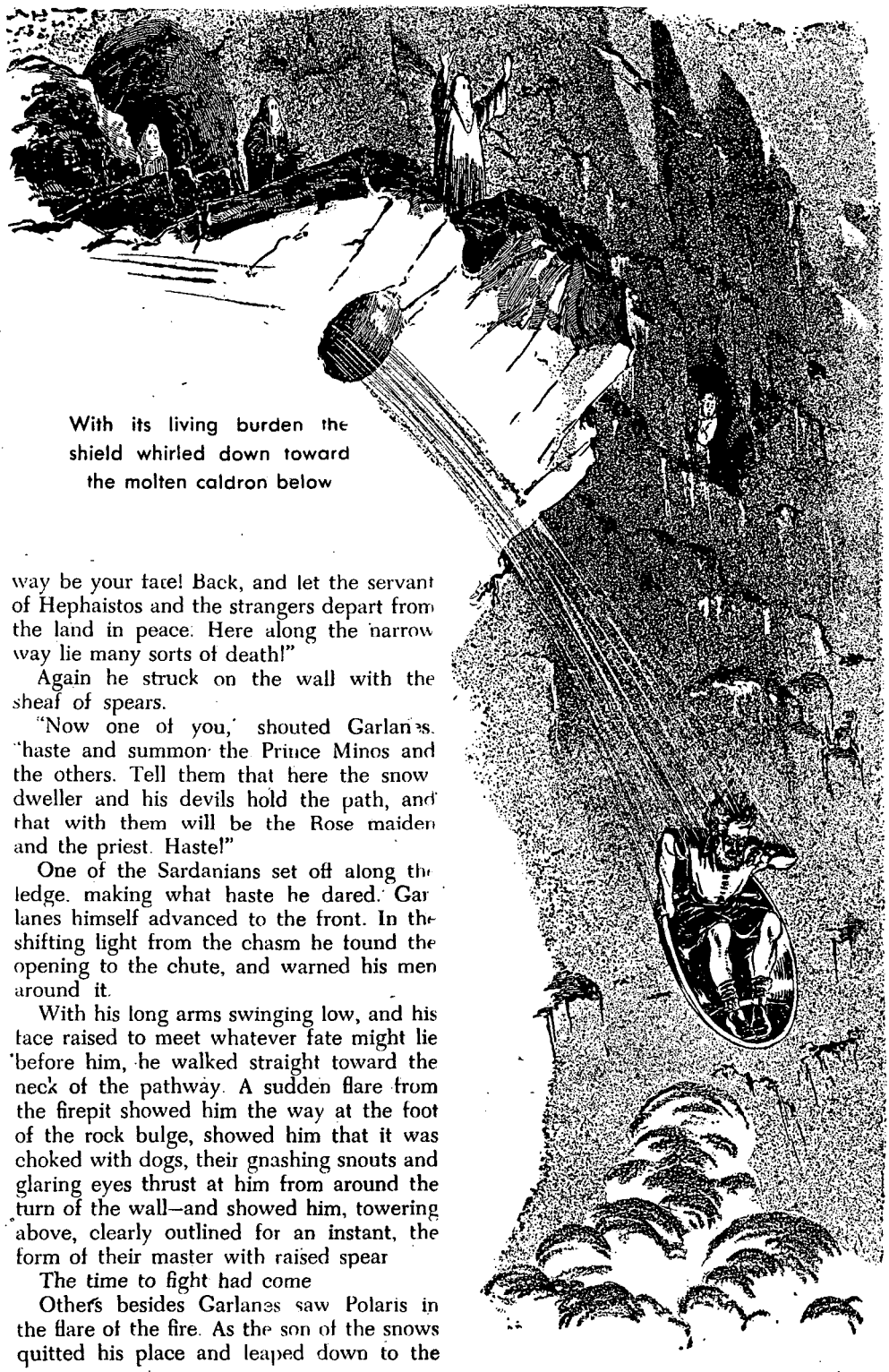
Only Polaris saw the end. Shaken with horror, he did not neglect to turn to his advantage the accident; for accident it was. As the party of Garlanes came on, he had smitten the wall at his side with the shafts of the spears he carried, and had given vent at the same time to a deep-chested groan. He did not know that the seven of the pack had slunk back on his trail, and crouched at the foot of the rock, ready for battle. Their echoing challenge to the foe startled him almost as much as it did the Sardanians.

The young leader, in the face of that blast of clamor, had started so violently that he struck his shins against the shield of wood at his feet, collapsed into it, and was whirled down the terrible chute to instant death.

Again the Sardanians proved their innate courage. Their companion torn from them and cast to a fate that they could neither see nor explain, his death-shrieks ringing in their ears, they did not break or give back. They stood fast and made ready to advance. From the gloom in front the menacing snarling of the dogs swelled in volume. It was quieted again when spoke the voice of the dreaded stranger from the snows.

"Back, ye men of Sardanes!" thundered Polaris from the height. "Back, ere the fate of him who hath but now passed the gate-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



With its living burden the shield whirled down toward the molten caldron below

way be your fate! Back, and let the servant of Hephaistos and the strangers depart from the land in peace. Here along the narrow way lie many sorts of death!"

Again he struck on the wall with the sheaf of spears.

"Now one of you," shouted Garlanes, "haste and summon the Prince Minos and the others. Tell them that here the snow dweller and his devils hold the path, and that with them will be the Rose maiden and the priest. Haste!"

One of the Sardanians set off along the ledge, making what haste he dared. Garlanes himself advanced to the front. In the shifting light from the chasm he found the opening to the chute, and warned his men around it.

With his long arms swinging low, and his face raised to meet whatever fate might lie before him, he walked straight toward the neck of the pathway. A sudden flare from the firepit showed him the way at the foot of the rock bulge, showed him that it was choked with dogs, their gnashing snouts and glaring eyes thrust at him from around the turn of the wall—and showed him, towering above, clearly outlined for an instant, the form of their master with raised spear

The time to fight had come

Others besides Garlanes saw Polaris in the flare of the fire. As the son of the snows quitted his place and leaped down to the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ledge among the dogs, several spears splintered against the rock wall where he had stood.

Wondering much how Kalin and the Rose were faring, and if he might hold off their pursuers until the sledge was through the wall safely, he slipped along to the narrowest point of the path and ordered back the dogs. Again a flare of fire from the depths showed his position to the enemy, and an ilium bladed spear was his greeting, hissing past his cheek to go clattering down the declivity of the precipice.

Urged by Garlanes, the Sardanians had crept dangerously near. Polaris held his hand no longer. He steadied himself and hurled a spear. The man next behind Garlanes fell to the floor of the ledge and lay twitching horribly in silence. The glittering point of the spear was set fast in his throat. Once more the light gave him opportunity and another stout Sardanian gave up the ghost before his unerring cast.

Then Garlanes waited no longer, for the coming of Minos, but gathered his men and charged.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HUMBLING OF MINOS

IT WAS no part of Polaris's program to take part in a hand-to-hand fight with the pursuers. There were seven of them remaining, and with nothing but his own safety at stake, he might have been confident of the issue; but he did not dare, under the circumstances, to take the risk of the encounter.

When he saw that a charge might be delayed no longer, he turned and ran swiftly along the curve of the ledge, the dogs racing with him. He, the fleetest of runners, now went at top speed. When he stopped, some hundred and fifty feet away, Garlanes and his men had barely rounded the bulge of rock to the wider part of the path.

They charged the neck of the way, and, finding the way widen, where there was nothing to take cover behind, they quite naturally hesitated for the next move of their foe.

That move came quickly. Garlanes, in the lead, heard something sing past his ear like an angry bee. The man next behind him felt something strike him over the heart, and he threw up his hands and crumpled to the floor. The walls of the mighty tunnel flung back a crashing echo to the sharp report of the rifle. Kneeling close to the wall, peering through the fitful light, Polaris watched the effect of his shot.

Vainly he hoped that superstition would come to his aid and hold the Sardanians back from the carnage. They were dismayed. By the intermittent flares of garish light from the throat of the volcano, Polaris could see their consternation in their faces and gestures; but he had not stopped them.

After a momentary examination of the body of their comrade, they came on, but slowly.

With loud cries of encouragement, Prince Minos and his men, summoned by the messenger from Garlanes, poured around the corner of the rock, and the entire body came on apace.

Again Polaris took up the retreat, running swiftly, and keeping well out of the range of the spear casting. Presently, when he deemed that he must be nearly half-way around the rim of the crater, he came to another narrower part of the pathway where a large rock lay, behind which he could crouch. There he decided to make his stand, and to retreat no farther until the summons of Kalin should tell him that the sledge was clear of the tunnel.

He refilled the magazine of the rifle, and waiting calmly for the flickering light to make his aim sure, he began methodically to pick off the foremost pursuers, making every bullet count. Under the pitiless accuracy of his fire, the Sardanians lagged uncertainly, but always they crept nearer.

Six times had the brown rifle sent its death unseen, almost unfelt, across the arc of the crater rim, when there was a stir among the dogs behind the marksman, a touch on his shoulder, a voice in his ear.

"Come, brother, all is ready. Haste thee before they close in!" called Kalin.

Not a score of yards farther they came to a passage in the wall, or, rather, a fissure through it, which seemed to have been floored by the hand of man at some distant time. It led at right angles from the crater shelf. As Polaris looked into it he could see that it was lighted dimly by the light of day. It was barely wide enough for the passage of the sledge, and it so twisted in the rock that it had been a slow and difficult task for the priest to drive the ponies through.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Circumstance willed that they were not to pass the tunnel without further mishap and bloodshed.

Slowly the enemy had crept up. When Kalin and Polaris broke cover and dashed for the mouth of the tunnel, the foremost of the Sardanians was only a short spear throw behind. In the momentary pause at the mouth of the tunnel, men and dogs were bunched, and offered a fair target to the Sardanians leaping along the ledge.

With a scream of pain and rage, the dog Pallas leaped thrice her height from the floor and fell, writhing in her death agonies. A spear had penetrated behind the poor brute's shoulder, nearly piercing the body through.

Her death wail was drowned in the terrible challenge that came from the throats of the pack, and the cry of anger that rose from the lips of her master. Kalin stood alone at the mouth of the narrow way, holding the rifle that had been thrust into his hands. In the midst of his leaping, snarling dogs, Polaris, raging like a demon at the slaughter of his old playmate and servant, threw himself back into the teeth of the charge of Minos's men.

Clutching a heavy spear in his right hand and whirling it like a toy, and with a revolver in his left, he swept down the ledge, thrusting and firing. Around him the six dogs of the pack fought after their own fashion, rending and snapping like devils.

In the face of that attack the Sardanians shrank aghast.

Thirty feet or more back along the pathway Polaris fought blindly for vengeance before his reason returned to him. In front of him the Sardanians were huddled in the path, backing away and obstructed in their flight by those behind who were pushing forward, under the threats and commands of Minos, the Prince.

Polaris's brain cleared. He heard the voice of Kalin calling to him to return. He turned and raced swiftly to the tunnel, over the bodies of the dead. Behind him the rush of pursuit gathered and came on again.

Through the tunnel they raced, dogs and men, and came out into the sunlight, which shone on crags and boulders and bare earth.

"Quickly, now; the rocking stone—tip it over!" gasped the priest.

Where the tunnel ended was its narrowest point. A man might reach out and touch both walls. On the rock above the entrance beetled what Kalin called the "rocking stone." It was an enormous boulder, the fang of some glacial jaw in the primeval, or a fragment spat from the maw of the volcano. Where it had come to rest, at the very verge of the tunnel entrance, it was balanced. So nice was its adjustment on its natural pedestal that the breath of a strong breeze caused it to sway, or rock gently; the hand of a strong man might increase the oscillation greatly.

"Tip it over!" gasped Kalin, pointing with his hand.

A glance told Polaris his purpose. In the passage swelled the clamor of pursuit. He sprang up the rocks, set his powerful shoulder under the belly of the immense stone, and shoved with all his strength.

Over swayed the stone—farther than it had ever swayed before in all the centuries that it had stood there. The solid rock of its foundation grated and crumbled. Over it swung but not far enough to fall. To the straining man, whole minutes seemed to be passing as the stone hung; then, despite his utmost effort, it shuddered—and swung back!

Polaris turned and set his broad back to the surface of the stone as it oscillated. He waited until its recoil swing was completed, and, as it again inclined toward the fissure, he straightened his doubled legs and put forth all the power in his magnificent muscles.

He heard the roaring of the leaping blood in his ears. He heard the uneasy crumbling of the rock at his feet. He shut his eyes and strained grimly—triumphantly! The resistance ceased, and he threw himself on his side to avoid falling. The huge boulder pitched into the tunnel, grinding and crashing ,and settled its weight of tons squarely across the passage.

As it went down, there was a flash of white beneath it, and the body of a tall man shot through the portals that were closing forever, and fell on his face on the slope.

It was Minos the Prince! Outdistancing all his men, he had dashed through the passage, and hurled himself at the daylight not one second too soon to escape being crushed under the fall of the rocking stone. Behind his flying heels it closed down, grimly and solidly, splintering the walls at either side to make way for itself. When it rested on the floor of the crevice it completely filled the entrance. Not a squirrel could have clambered through.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DULLY through the wall of rock penetrated the dismayed clamor of the Sardanians in the passage, and the muted sound of their spears smiting on the stone. No efforts of theirs could so much as shake the boulder. Nothing short of giant powder would dislodge it.

Desperate at his plight, made mad with fury, or surpassingly daring was Minos the Prince, for he picked himself up with a shout and charged headlong at the men and dogs who confronted him.

"This task to me brother," shouted Polaris to Kalin, who lifted spear to defend himself. Polaris had sprung down from the pedestal of the rocking stone, and he leaped unhesitatingly into the path of Minos.

With lightning swiftness he caught a grip on the haft of the spear which the prince whirled up to pierce him. For a moment the two men stood tense, with upstretched arms, battling fiercely, but without motion, for the mastery of the weapon. Then Polaris widened his grip on the shaft and twisted it sharply from his antagonist's grasp.

They stood breathing deeply, and Polaris cast the spear away, at the same time sternly ordering off the dogs which would have rushed on Minos.

"A trick," said Minos with a smile, glancing at his empty hands. "Another trick, O clever stranger! Now try a fall with Minos, where tricks will not avail." He flung his arms around Polaris.

His grip was of steel. In all Sardanes the "smiling prince" was known as the strongest man. Once, for a wager, he had trussed the legs of a full grown pony, and had carried it on his shoulders unaided, from the river to the Judgement House.

Round about Polaris his long legs tightened, and he tugged upward mightily, in an effort to tear his antagonist from his foothold and hurl him down. He would have plucked an ordinary man from the earth like a toy, but he was not pitted against an ordinary man. He was the strongest man in Sardanes, but Sardanes was small, and her strong men few. Polaris was perhaps the strongest man in the world.

He stood firm. Not only that, but he thrust his hands upwards, gripping the prince in the armpits, and slowly straightened his arms, despite the utmost effort of the struggling prince to pinion them to his sides. Strain as Minos might, he could not break that grip beneath his shoulders.

Slowly, very slowly, Polaris straightened his arms. As he did so, he bent his hands in from the wrists, exerting an ever increasing pressure at each side of Minos's broad chest. To his own intense astonishment, the prince, whom no man ever had mastered, felt his foothold growing insecure, felt his ribs slowly curving in and his breathing growing short and painful, felt his mighty arms slipping.

In vain he straightened up to his towering height and shook his sweep of shoulders. His terrible grip was broken.

Polaris suddenly loosed his hold, passed his arms up within those of the prince, and brought them down with elbows bended, freeing himself entirely. He caught Minos by the wrists, and exerting a strength that almost crushed the bones, he pressed downward swiftly and relentlessly.

The Prince of Sardanes knelt on the bare rock at the feet of the son of the snows.

No word had been spoken. Polaris let fall his enemy's wrists, and pointed along the mountainside toward the pass that led into the valley.

"Yonder lieth thy way, back to Sardanes, prince," he said gently. "Go back to thy people and rule them wisely, O Minos. Seek not to follow us. We go hence on a far journey, and will not be denied or turned. As to the strife that hath arisen, no man can regret it more than I. Farewell."

Minos answered not, and Polaris turned to the girl and the priest. He saw that all was in readiness for their going. Tethered to a tree below them in the mountain's belt of green were the snorting ponies. He threw out his arm in a sweeping gesture. "The way to the north is open," he said. "Let us be going."

CHAPTER XIX

KALIN WINS HIS KNOWLEDGE

FOR fifty miles Polaris and Kalin drove the Sardanian ponies along the Hunters' Road, while the dogs of the pack raced strong and free at the sides of the sledge. Alas, it was now but a five-dog pack! Octavius had given his life in the crater, in the mad fight to avenge the death of Pallas. Two Sardanians had fallen under his gashing jaws when a spear-thrust found his vitals, and in his death-pain he had leaped over

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the rim of the fire-pit to the molten lake in the depths.

Of the pack remained Juno, Hector, Julius, Nero, and Marcus, the giant leader.

Urged on by voice and crack of whip, the ponies tore along the snow-paths, mile after mile. Rose Emer rode on the sledge, and the men beside it with the dogs.

When they had traveled fifty miles or more, the little beasts showed signs of going to pieces, and Polaris halted them. Enough fodder had been taken from the valley to give the animals one good meal. The men fed them and made camp.

After the ponies were somewhat rested from their long pull in the snows, Polaris pointed their noses toward home and whipped them into the trail. Tossing their heads in the air, the little beasts set off along the road in a cloud of fine snow-dust upflung from their scurrying hoofs.

"Yonder goeth the last link with thy land, Kalin," said Polaris, as the men and the maid stood to watch the departure of the small horses.

"Aye," replied the priest and smiled. "Now be *thy* land my land. On to the north," and he pointed ahead with steady hand to where the massive ice barrier stood in their path, its glittering sides gleaming a steely blue in the sunlight. He turned to Rose Emer.

"Lady," he said in the halting English, of which he had acquired a surprising knowledge, considering the few days that had elapsed since he first had heard that tongue —"lady, Kalin—American—now."

"Yes," smiled the girl in answer; "am I not well guarded? Two American gentlemen to watch over me. I could have no better protectors."

Kalin caught the significance of her remark, and smiled his wonderfully sweet, sad smile—the smile that always struck to the heart of Polaris with a prescience of sorrow to come.

Inland they pushed, skirting the base of the towering ice-wall, seeking for some spot where they might pass over or through it. Disaster dogged fast on their heels, waiting to strike.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On the seventh day out from the valley the first blow fell.

They had passed the ice-ridge. After three days of groping along its base, they came to a place where the mighty wall was deeply notched and the slope was less steep. There, aided by a heavy fall of snow, which partly melted and then froze, giving a scant foothold on the ice-hills, they were able to pass.

ONE entire day was consumed in making passage. At length they passed the wall in safety, and found themselves in an apparently interminable stretch of plain and hummock and crevasse, where the going was slow and laborious and exceedingly perilous.

Then the priest fell ill.

Either the unaccustomed fare—their diet now consisted almost entirely of fish and boiled snow water prepared over the little oil stove—or the rigor of the atmosphere and the exertions caused a sudden decline in the bodily powers of Kalin. Strive as he might, his waning strength became apparent, and he lagged in the journeying through the steppes of snow.

The capstone of trouble came when his eyes unused to the continual glare of the relentless sun on the fields of snow and the cliffs of ice, gave way to the dread snow blindness, the *bête noir* of all explorers in polar regions.

For hours he was able to conceal his blindness from his companions. With stubborn will bent to the task, he ran on with the sledge, guiding himself with his hand at its rail, after the last faint glimmerings of sight had vanished. He had a splendid will, and he made it dominate his weakening body long after it seemed that his muscular strength was unequal to the demand of the trail. It was impossible for them to travel as swiftly as they had, but he would not yield to his creeping weakness, and still ran on.

When the darkness fell he was undismayed and said nothing, hoping against hope that it would pass away. He could no longer keep up his pretense, however, at the first camping spot, and his companions saw him groping helplessly once he had quitted the side of the sledge.

His plight struck a chill to the stout heart of Polaris, who realized that in speed lay their only hope of earthly salvation. Bitter weather lay to the north of the ice barrier, and there was almost no game from which to replenish their stock of food. The days of travel had diminished it to the point where a fresh supply had come to be a problem demanding speedy solution.

Now, to accommodate their pace to that of the tottering blind man, or to carry him, nearly doubling the load of the dogs, spelled almost sure defeat.

He gave no inklings of his foreboding to either Kalin or Rose Emer, but cheered the priest as best he might in his affliction, and pressed on with what speed was possible. Three more laps on the journey they made before the steely fortitude of Kalin gave way, and he could no longer force his exhausted limbs to bear the weight of his failing body. In mid career across the snows, he stumbled from the path and fell prone in lee of a huge drift.

Polaris plucked him from the snow.

"Kalin is outdone!" gasped the Sardanian. "Thou, my brother, and the Lady Rose must go forward and leave me. On to the north, O brother! Kalin dieth!"

"Not so, Kalin," answered Polaris. "My breath will leave my body before I desert my brother. Didst thou falter in Sardanes, when all were against the strangers? And shall Polaris desert thee now?"

"But for the lady's sake, thou must," persisted Kalin. "Thou mayest not fail her, and delay is death."

"She would not buy even her life at such a price, O Kalin," said Polaris. "Together we will fare to the north, or together will we keep eternal watch here in the snows."

Unheedful of the protests of the priest, he carried him to the sledge and rearranged the load on the vehicle, making a place for Kalin at the rear behind the girl. Thus they took up again the tale of the journey, but more slowly than they had yet traveled, the load taxing the powers of the diminishing team-pack.

Once broken in the pride of his endurance, the priest rapidly lost hold on himself, and his vitality seemed to ooze from him with the passing hours. At the second stop after Polaris had made a place for him on the sledge the son of the snows discovered that one of his legs, which seemed to be paralyzed, was frozen from foot to knee; yet Kalin did not seem to know it.

At the close of a particularly trying march —their going no longer could be called a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dash—Polaris made their camp at the sheltered side of one of the hummocks of rock and ice with which the land was sprinkled, and all of them, dogs and humans, slumbered wearily for many hours.

Polaris awoke with a strange weight at his throat. It was the ilium necklace of Kalin, in which glimmered the red stones He held it up for an instant in wonder at its presence there and then sprang to the priest's sleeping parka.

It was empty Kalin was not in the camp!

CHAPTER XX

HOPE—AND A WILL

WITHOUT arousing the girl, Polaris made hasty search Some rods along the back trail, he saw a break in the snow at the side of the trail There he found the priest lying on his back, with his face turned up to the sun and his keen-pointed dagger piercing his heart. He had stumbled thither as far as his endurance would sustain him More joyful than ever it had seemed in life was the half smile at the lips of the dead man.

That smile was the only message he had left. He had been dead for hours.

Polaris drew the dagger from the dead heart that had loved him well and hurled it afar in the snow He smoothed the dress of the priest and bore the body to the camp Before he aroused the girl he placed the corpse again in the sleeping parka.

Then he called the girl and told her that Kalin was dead, but made no mention of the way the priest had taken.

"Ah, another brave heart stilled—and because of me!" she cried, and the tears came, for she had liked the priest well. As she wept, Polaris told her of the love the man had borne her.

"And, lady," he said, "wherever Kalin is, he is well content, for he has aided you toward your dearest wishes and his soul asked no more than that."

He dug with the blade of a spear at the foot of one of the icy monoliths, and laid the corpse of Kalin there, while the dogs, which always seemed to sense the presence of death, bayed a hoarse requiem above the grave. But neither then nor at any future time did Polaris tell the girl of the supreme sacrifice Kalin made at the last, not wishing to make her suffer more regret.

On the rude grave he had made he piled a few loose fragments of rock, and turned to the task of breaking camp for the next northward lap into the wild land.

TWO hundred miles to the north and east, three men were gathered on the snow-crust in a little valley, wrenching and thrumming at the wires and pinions of the first bird-machine that ever had penetrated into the fastnesses of the antarctic.

All was taut for the start. The wings were set The engines responded to the power. The propeller thrilled the air. Into the seat climbed a lean, fur-clad young man, with a thin face, high cheek-bones shadowing deep-set, cold, blue eyes, and a wisp of drab moustache above thin, eager lips.

'Ready there, Aronson," he said, to a man standing by.

A second later Captain James Scoland sailed majestically away into the white mystery of the unknown polar land

At the door of the snow house that had been their home for days, Aronson and Mikel, who had pressed with him to his farthest south camp, watched his going with shaded eyes. A tiny silken flag bearing the stars and stripes, fluttered from one of the canvas plane wings. Mikel watched it as far as it was distinguishable.

'An' here's hopin' he carries Old Glory safely through to the pole—an' back again!" he shouted.

Leagues farther to the north, in another tiny camp, three other men were waiting, also. Still farther on, in an ice-locked harbor, the good ship Felix rode day by day, the little company of its crew watching the slow passing of the hours, with every ear attuned to catch the first voice returning from the south that should tell of success, or of defeat and death.

And were that tale of success, those on the ship nursed a heavy sorrow, that would turn into bitterness all the glory of success. A glorious maid and two men who had been of their company had strayed from the ship and perished in the wilderness.

SILENCE.

As far as the eye could reach, a dull wilderness, stretching wearily under a leaden, sunless sky. A rolling plain of lusterless snow, cut sharply here and there by crevasses, gashed at intervals by rifts of unknown depths and tortuous gulleys. North

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and south seemingly without bounds; east and west, many a mile of bleak fatigue between low, sullen hills of gray.

A land without sound, without life, and without hope.

Yet, among the ridges in that dead and twilight chaos, something stirred. A dark speck crawled on and on, writhing along the brinks of the crevasses, skirting the yawning rifts, twisting in and out around the hummocks, like the course of some wriggling vermin across the cracked and gaping skin of a white, unholy corpse.

Northward, ever northward, the b l o t dragged its crooked way. Nearer would it resolve itself into two wearily plodding beasts, tugging, slipping, stumbling, but going on, the creaking straps of their leathern harness pulling a sledge with a heap of skins upon it. Still nearer—a fur-clad, haggard man with hollow, blazing eyes glittering through an unkempt shock of golden hair and a gaunt gray dog with drooping tail picking their way with s o u n d l e s s feet through the white reaches, dragging their sledge; like a fantasy passing across the white and silent dream of the cold end of the world.

Once the dog had looked up into the face of the master, the dumb eloquence of sacrifice shining through its eyes, an age-old fire. The massive jaws slipped apart, but closed again; only a sigh was breathed from the beasts's broad chest.

"Aye, Marcus, I know," muttered the man. "I know that you'll die on your four feet, if you can, and in the straps. And I, Marcus," his voice dropped to a whisper, "I'll die, too, Marcus, as you will—for the Rose—all for the Rose— But not yet, Marcus; for the Rose yet lives, and death is slow for the very strong."

Five luckless days had passed since the priest had laid his burdens by. One by one the cruel south had taken lives in toll, until only Polaris and the grim pack leader stood in harness to race with death on the course to the north.

First polar bears, made mad by hunger, attacked the party, and two of the dogs, Juno and Nero, died under the sweeping crescent claws.

A nameless distemper, from which no dog, however carefully bred, is quite immune, had seized both Hector and Julius. For hours they acted strangely as they ran, and then, at a stopping place, they went quite mad and turned on the man and girl.

Hector went down to silence under the crushing jaws of Marcus, who rose with a mighty roar to quell this insane mutiny; and Julius died on the spear of Polaris. There were tears on the cheek of the man as he drove the weapon home.

Refashioning the harness to suit his own wide shoulders, Polaris then took up the work of the lost dogs. For two long days of many marches he and Marcus had dragged the sledge. Now, with their stock of provisions dwindled away and their rations slender, the terrific strain of the journey was telling almost to madness on the man and the dog.

They came to rest in the shelter of one of the thousands of hummocks, and Polaris realized, with a chill at his stout heart, that their march had advanced them a bare score of miles from their last stopping place, when they should have covered at least twice that distance.

From her nestling place beneath the heap of furs on the sledge he gently aroused Rose Emer. The girl rode most of the weary miles in light and fitful slumbers, drowsy with the cold, and her brain at times benumbed by the prospect, now nearer and nearer, of almost certain disaster—a contingency which the man would not admit.

She came forth listlessly, and they prepared their poor meal over the flame of the little oil-burner, and ate it within the shelter of the skins which the man stretched to confine the heat from the stove. They divided their rations with Marcus, and girl and man and dog huddled at the side of the sledge, to sleep if they might until the time for the next setting forth along the terrible way.

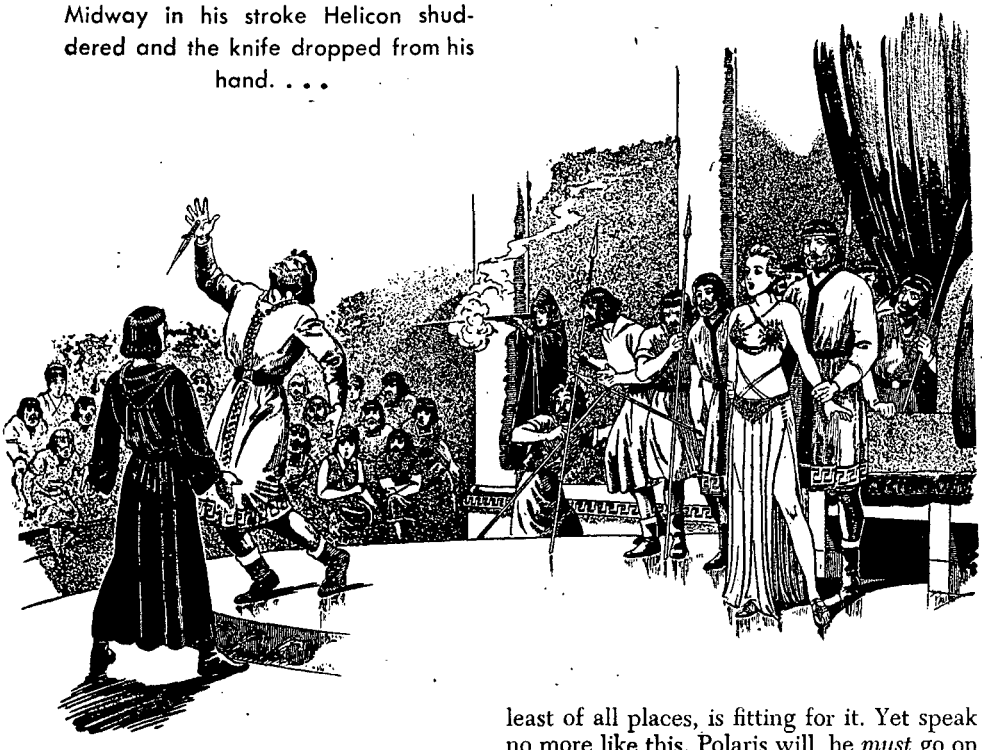
SOME hours later, when Polaris awakened her, ready for the next march forward, she shook her head wearily.

"No, my dear friend, you will have to go on without me. No," as he opened his mouth in quick question, "listen to me. I have thought it all out. If we continue on in this way we can proceed but a few miserable miles at the best, and then perish in the snow. I am the handicap. Without me, you and the dog could leave the sledge and go on alone, and, perhaps, save yourselves. You were born and have lived in this land, and you could get through alone; where, with me to look after, you will not succeed."

Polaris listened in silence, and a smile

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Midway in his stroke Helicon shuddered and the knife dropped from his hand. . . .



gathered at the corners of his mouth, as sad and wistful as any of Kalin's.

"Too much has been done and suffered already on my account," the girl went on. "I cannot let you make this sacrifice. You are as brave and true a gentleman as lives in the world today. All that human being can do, you have done for me. You must not die for me. You must go on and leave me—"

Her voice broke, and she hid her face in her hands. She felt the touch of Polaris's hand on her shoulder.

"Lady," he began, and his strong voice quivered. "Lady, what has Polaris done that you judge him so"

"Ah, no, no!" she sobbed, "you have been good and brave and true, even to the end—but the end is here. Oh, you *must* go on—"

For a moment the man stood and gazed down on her, as she sat with her head bent low: He started to hold out his arms toward her, then clenched his hands at his sides. Immediately he relaxed them, stooped, and swung her lightly from her seat on the furs, and tucked her tenderly in her place on the sledge.

"Dear lady," he said softly, "never did Polaris think to quarrel with you, and here, least of all places, is fitting for it. Yet speak no more like this. Polaris will, he *must* go on as he has gone. If he dies, it will be the death of an American gentleman, not that of a savage and a coward. Come, Marcus!"

He slipped his shoulders into the harness with the dog, and again they went forward into the gray unknown. Through tears the girl watched the strong back bending to its task ahead of her. In her eyes a great light kindled and burned steadily. Not all the antarctic snows might quench it.

They traversed four more laps across the snows, and were starting on their fifth when the final calamity fell.

As usual, they had camped close against the side of one of the larger mounds or hummocks. It was of rock, coated heavily with ice and frozen snow. On its beetling side, just above their little camp, a mass of rock had cracked away from the main body of the hummock. Its slow separation had been a matter of years, perhaps ages. That fracture might have been begun by the grinding fangs of a glacier five thousand years ago, and completed by the tireless and eternal frosts.

There it was poised, masked by the snow and ice, waiting its time to fall.

At the moment that the travelers turned their faces from camp, and Polaris started to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

assist Rose Emer to her seat on the sledge, the hour struck for the fall. Rock grated on rock above them, warning the man to spring back. He dragged the girl aside. A few pieces of ice rattled down. Then the fragment, a weight of tons, toppled squarely down upon the rear of the sledge, crushing it to splinters, and burying it in the loose snow.

They stared at the wreck, and Marcus growled and strained to free himself from the harness.

Polaris dug aside the covering snow. A moment's inspection showed that the sledge was nothing but shattered uselessness. Indeed, could he have repaired it, he had not the chance. It was beneath the mass of the fallen rock, too great a weight for even his powers to remove. Some of their vanishing store of provisions also lay under the rock.

"We still can walk, lady," Polaris said. "We will go on together."

"No, dear friend, we will not walk on," she replied. "See, my foot is hurt, and I can scarcely stand upon it. A splinter of ice struck it when the rock fell—"

Polaris leaped to her side and examined the extended ankle. He found it not broken, but bruised and swelling rapidly. It was true that she could not walk on it, nor would for many days.

HE MADE no answer to her last argument. He tore several skins robes from the fore part of the sledge, and set her down on them. Then, as well as he could, he bandaged the bruised ankle, winding it with strips of hide, outside the girl's boot, for he dared not remove the coverings from the injured limb lest the cold do it irreparable injury.

His hasty surgery completed, he stepped to the ruin of the sledge and filled two skin sacks with the remains of the meat which he could come at. He strapped one of them on the back of Marcus, and the other he slung on his own shoulders.

With his knife he cut and fashioned at one of the skin robes. When he approached the girl again he wore a rude sling, which he had passed about his neck and shoulders, so that it hung across his broad chest.

He plucked her from the snow, wrapped her in a robe, and set her in the sling at his breast. He stooped, and with his knife cut Marcus out of the useless harness.

Unbelievable as it was that human beings so beset could continue to exist, they proceeded thus for the space of two days. At the end of each short march they huddled together in their robes—the girl and the dog and the man, and warmed with the heat of their bodies their frozen food, until they might chew and mumble it. Still closer they huddled for their fitful slumbers.

On the march the girl swooned many times with the throbbing pain of her swollen ankle. Always she awoke to find herself in the man's arms. They wound about her, a living barrier, which death itself could not pass. All the weary miles of the weary marches he carried her.

Under her weight, every muscle of his splendid body was racked with the pangs of torture, until the fierce pain was succeeded by a numbness that slowly enveloped his body and crept up to his brain. He felt that he had been transformed into a marching machine of unfeeling steel. He went on, bearing his burden, mile after mile, stolidly, doggedly, splendidly.

Two days passed. Polaris roused himself from where they slept huddled in a little hollow in the snow.

The mere rising to his feet was a matter of minutes, and he swayed uncertainly. Once more he fought fiercely with the temptation to acknowledge that this, indeed, was the end, and to follow the footsteps of Kalin. Once more his courage upheld his resolve. He would go on. He would walk until he could walk no longer. Then he would crawl on his hands and knees, drag himself forward with his hands, but he would go on.

As he stooped there came to his ears a humming, faint and far away. He arranged the robe and gathered Rose Emer gently into the ling. With immense effort he straightened his knees and back and stood erect again. Again the humming noise, nearer now, and louder! Marcus floundered out of the hollow, both ears pricked, and growled a weak, hoarse defiance. Polaris followed.

From a distant humming the noise rose to a shrilling; from a shrilling to a prolonged shriek. The man came out of the hollow, and his eyes sought the sky, whence came the sound. His heart bounded and threatened to burst in his breast.

SHARPLY outlined against the dazzling sky, sailing along on steady planes like a great white bird of the air, her engine pur-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ring and thrilling, and her propeller screaming, an air-ship passed athwart his vision!

Enthralled, his eyes, followed it. It was less than half a mile away to his right. He tried to shout aloud, but his voice was feeble, and seemed to be thrown back at him from the air. Before he could rouse the girl, or convey to her senses what was occurring, the ship of the air had vanished. It dipped out of sight into the mouth of a little valley.

He looked again. No, his eyes did not deceive. Smoke was curling up from the valley, a thin blue spiral. The bird man had alighted there. There was a camp of men. Food and warmth, rescue and life for his precious burden—all were there in that little valley, a bare quarter of a mile away across the snow. Could he ever reach it?

Into his brain leaped a multitude of quick thoughts. Joy and the shadow of an old suspicion came together. He knelt again in the snow and aroused Rose Emer.

"Lady," he said very softly, "you are saved. Yonder," and he pointed across the snow toward the valley—"yonder is the smoke of a camp, and an air-ship from the south just landed in that valley."

Rose Emer strained her eyes across the snow. She saw the smoke and comprehended. For an instant she bowed her face on her arms. When she raised it her eyes were streaming. Out of hard despair tear time had come again. She caught his hand to her breast, and then raised it to her lips. He snatched it from her.

"Oh, but I thank you; words are too feeble to say it. I thank you for life, Polaris!"

"Lady," he made answer, "I am going to make a strange request of you. Yonder are those of your own people—the American captain and his men. It is my wish that when we come among them you will say nothing of my origin, of where you found me, or what has befallen us, more than is necessary to tell—"

"It is enough that you ask it," the girl broke in. "Never mind any further reason. I will do as you say."

He groped within the breast of his furred waistcoat and took out a small, flat packet, sewn in membranous parchment. "One more favor of your kindness, lady," he asked. "Please keep this packet until I ask it of you again. It is the message which I carry to the world at the north. Should I pass into the world of shadows, you will do me a great service if you will open it and send its contents to whom it is directed."

Rose Emer took the packet and hid it in her bosom.

"Now we will go on to the valley, before strength fails entirely," he said. He straightened up again, and bent to the toil of the pathway which he had marked out for himself. The girl leaned back against his straining breast. Once more, when she might have spoken, she kept silence.

They went on. Slowly, uncertainly, for Polaris staggered much, foot by foot, he fought his way across that bleak and endless quarter of a mile of snow.

Three hours after the air-ship had landed from its history-making dash in and out of the jaws of the antarctic, Captain Scoland and his two men were startled in their camp by an apparition.

Down the slope of the valley and through a circle of snarling dogs that rushed to attack and then slunk back affrighted, strode a grim-faced and silent man. On he came like a machine, or like one who walks wide-eyed at night. Behind him crept the tottering skeleton of a great gray wolf dog.

Slung across the breast of the man was a fur-wrapped bundle. With measured tread he walked on to the door of the shelter, paused, and with no word let his burden gently down into the snow. A corner of the robe fell aside and disclosed the face of Rose Emer. She had swooned, and lay like one dead.

Captain Scoland sprang forward with a strained cry of surprise and question. The strange man stood for an instant, his unseeing eyes fixed on the snow reaches beyond the valley. Then he tossed his arms above his head and pitched backward, inert and lifeless. The tottering wreck of a dog crept up and licked his face.

CHAPTER XXI

AMERICA!

"THEY say the wild man is going to live," said a voice.

"Yes, Doc Clawson says he'll pull through all right," said another. "He's had a close call, if ever a man had. I wonder who and what he is."

"So do I," rejoined the first voice. "Do you believe that, that he is a wild man?"

"Dunno. What you goin' to believe?" The

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

first voice became confidential. "I heard Doc tell the mate that he hadn't spoke an English word in all his sick ravings, except 'Lady,' which he might have learned from the girl. Then there's the knife. Captain's got that. It ain't like no metal any one ever saw. There's letters on it Doc says are Greek, but nobody here can read 'em. Doc says he believes what the chap jabbers in Greek too."

"He's got a queer necklace, too," chimed in the second voice. "It's made of the same kind of stuff as the knife is, and strung with red pebbles. Wonder what they'll do with him?"

"Sh-h-h! Don't you let your wonderin' run away with you. Cap's actin' queerer and queerer. Did you notice him when he came aft this mornin'—after the talk he had with the doc? I tell you somethin's gone wrong, all right—"

Scuffling footsteps broke the tenor of the voices, and they faded away to a murmur, and then to silence.

Those scraps of a conversation drifted to the mind of Polaris, where for hours and hours a tiny spark of comprehension had been struggling back into being. They were the first words that his returning consciousness had understood.

He opened his eyes.

Surely that knot in the oaken beam above him was an old friend, the one shaped so like the head of a horse. And that row of iron bolt-heads; how often he had counted them over! He lay in a white-covered berth in a small cabin, in which every seam and stitch and object was strangely familiar, but which his reawakening consciousness refused to recognize. Sunlight was streaming in through a partly opened port, and with it came the sound of the sea.

Slowly, for he found it required considerable effort, he turned over on his side and looked about him. Where was he? Above all, how had he got there? As he moved he felt something at his neck slip, and through the open throat of the linen garment he wore fell the heavy loop of the necklace of Kalin.

Wondering, he stared at the iridescent links of ilium and the dull red stones. Then the spring that held the tight-wound coil of memory snapped, and the past unrolled like an endless ribbon.

He was weak. He had been ill. Yes, now he held the key—that conversation he had just heard. The "wild man" of whom the sailors talked was himself. He smiled. Already his yellow beard had grown long and ragged, and covered his throat. The knife, and the necklace—all of the talk had referred to him.

And they said that in all his delirium he had spoken no word of English! He smiled to himself once more. So even when his conscious self had departed from control of his body and mind, he had held fast to his fanciful resolution. Rose Emer must also have kept her promise. Not a soul but herself guessed who he was.

But that last part of the sailors' talk? What did that mean? What *were* they going to do with him?

In an instant he was alert and bitterly suspicious. He was on a ship, a ship at sea. He was in the power of the American captain, the man who had sought and probably found the great and mystic pole; also the man who was the affianced husband of the girl whom Polaris had carried across the snow deserts in his arms. Now he had a duty laid upon him, which he secretly guessed would conflict sorely with the wishes of the captain. While he lived, he would strive to carry out that duty.

BUT why had he lived? At the end of his terrible journey darkness had fallen upon him in the camp; why had it ever lifted? If it had not, he had been freed of his promise, and would have been content.

What had happened since then? Where was Rose Emer? The gossip of the sailors had included no news of her; but so the inference was that all was well with her. Where was Marcus? How long had he been ill?

These questions remained unanswered. He could not know that he had lain heavy and inert on a sledge for days, with only the thickness of their fur parkas separating him from Rose Emer, while Scoland's men, abandoning all that did not make for speed, had driven dogs to death in their wild dash back to the Felix.

He could not know that he had been given up for dead by the men, and that, even then, that conclusion brought little of regret to the heart of the American commander. Nor could he know that Rose Emer would not have it so, and that, under her entreaties, the supposed corpse had been carried on to the ship, and to the good medical man on it, who found that some-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where in the fastnesses of the silent form stretched before him a tiny flicker of life still abode, and would respond to care.

That care he had received, and in good measure. To Dr. Clawson he most certainly owed his life—twice over. Having saved it once, the integrity of the physician withstood the hint, almost brutally direct, from Scoland, that the man would be better off if he were let to die quietly.

Polaris was the one fly in the ointment of the daring captain of the Felix. His vague suspicions concerning the origin of the stranger and his business in the snow land had become an obsession. From the girl he could obtain no satisfaction, and only food for more suspicion. She would say little of her rescue, and less of her rescuer, taking refuge from anything like investigation in the declaration that the stirring of the memory of those days in the wilderness was too much for her already overwrought nervous system.

Scoland was a man greatly daring; he also was a man who would scruple little to remove, by any means that seemed safe to himself, any obstacle which stood between him and that which he desired. He had striven for a great prize and won. Another prize lay almost within his grasp. Should an obstacle to either intervene, he would do his utmost to sweep it aside.

Was this strange wanderer an obstacle? Could he be one of a party who had penetrated the fastnesses of the snows, to wrest from jaws of berg and glacier the secret of the pole?

Captain Scoland had heard of no such party. When he thought of how the man came, proofless, he smiled at his own suspicions. And yet—might not others have waited for the return of this man, as the crew of the Felix had waited for himself?

Then there was the strange demeanor of the girl, her reticence and her almost rapt interest in the man. Even now she might have been haunting the sick man's cabin, but that Scoland had persuaded her that his mind was gone, and that he was well enough off as far as the needs of the body were concerned.

To do the captain justice, the attitude of the girl, her interest in the strange man, were the minor considerations. Everything must step aside for his glory as the discoverer of the pole. Already the press of two hemispheres was heralding his successful return, and the savants of the nations were awaiting his proofs. There must be no cloud on his title, no question of his right. He would make that sure.

An unsuspected cunning in dealings with other men had been awakened in the breast of Polaris. Suddenly awake to the full consciousness of his mental powers, he was swayed by his suspicion, by the warnings his father had given him long ago, his oft-repeated advice as to the intentions and possible actions of the first white men he was apt to meet.

He was awake from delirium, and his head was clear. To all appearances his mind still wandered. A little observation taught him when a sailor brought him food from the cook's galley, and when to expect the visits of the doctor. They soon found him changed in one respect. He accepted food, and once or twice they surprised him floundering weakly about the little cabin. But he showed them no brightness of mind. His glances were vacant, his manners those of an imbecile almost.

He bided his time.

His strength came back to him slowly, although he concealed that fact. They were far up the coast, not two weeks journey from New York, when he first came to a realization of being, after his long siege of brain fever and weakness. In those two weeks he took every measure to prepare himself against their landing on American soil.

He knew not at all what he should face, but he wished to be ready for it with all his old-time strength and agility. Not entirely could he disassociate his mind from the idea that opposition and trouble must be answered with the strength of one's body.

The man who brought the food and the physician who tended him came only in the day time. Therefore Polaris spent most of his days supinely in his berth. At night he was supremely active. Up and down the narrow confines he paced. He leaped lightly. He stretched and strained each limb and muscle.

Hour after hour he endured the severest "calisthenics"—not those taught in the gymnasium, but anything and everything in the line of the motion to which his surroundings lent themselves.

AT LENGTH the Felix day in Quarantine. The next day they would dock. Scoland would meet and accept the homage of a na-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion which had gone temporarily wild over his exploits. Before that landing he would dispose of the living problem which lay and gibbered in the berth in the cabin that had been Burleson's.

Privately Scoland made arrangements with the authorities at a big institution for the care of the insane up the river. They were to send for the man. The captain explained that the patient was a member of his crew who had lost the balance of his mind due to the hardships he had endured.

That night Polaris checkmated all the captain's carefully made preparations. Tense with excitement, the son of the snows had realized that they lay near the land. Then he had seen it from the port. Snatches of talk of the sailors told him that it was New York at last—the city of his dreams. One scrap of conversation focused all his long-nursed doubts.

They had sailed to Quarantine through an almost continual blare of every kind of noise-making instrument on the decks of every ship they passed or met. With his head at the port Polaris caught, in a sudden interval of quiet, a few words from the deck above him. He recognized the voice of Captain Scoland, talking to the mate.

"They'll come for him in a launch at Quarantine," he said. "It's all arranged. Here's the cabin key. Better take a couple of the boys to help the keepers. He might try to make trouble."

That was all—*and enough!*

Soon after his return to consciousness Polaris had learned that the door to the cabin where he lay was kept locked always. It had been one of his earliest causes for suspicion. Some time after midnight that night he set his powerful shoulder to that door, and pressed his weight against it. Minutes he stood there, gradually increasing the pressure, until the lock sprung in its wards with a slight snap, and the knob yielded in his twisting fingers.

The man who had brought the food had left in the cabin a few rough garments such as the sailors wore. Polaris had donned them as he occasionally left the berth in the day time. He wore them now. Had any one met him, he scarcely would have been recognized as the "madman." He had found a razor in Burleson's cabin, and had shift to shave himself cleanly. He had hacked off the most of his long hair with the same instrument, and had disposed of the evidences of his tonsorial efforts by throwing all through the port into the harbor. Around his neck he wore the necklace of Kalin.

Only a half-defined notion of what he was about to do was in his mind, but there was no fear.

He stole along the silent corridor, and gained the deck and the rail, without being observed by the lone sailor on watch near the wheel-house. Ready to his hand, it seemed, were a short length of plank and a trailing rope, attached firmly to some part of the ship, but long enough and loose enough to serve him.

With the plank under one arm he clambered over the rail and let himself down with the rope. He could not swim a stroke, but he reached the water, and with one arm over the stout bit of plank, he struck out fearlessly for the glittering skyline of the great city that lay ahead.

CHAPTER XXII

THIRTY DAYS

BEFORE many hours Scoland raged quietly when he found that his "wild man" had flown from the cage. But he was tongue-tied. He set cautious inquiry on foot to ascertain what had become of the refugee. He could do no more without publicity, which he did not court. His agents were able to tell him no more than did the broken door of Burleson's cabin on the Felix. Polaris was traceless.

Worried intensely at the first by the disappearance and still apprehensive of a blow at his fortunes from the hand of the snow wanderer, as days went by and nothing was heard from the missing one Scoland breathed more freely. Doubtless the man had gone overboard and drowned; or, if he had reached shore, he had wandered on his ways and would not be heard from again.

Concealing the anxiety she felt, Rose Emer also secretly endeavored to trace the lost Polaris. She met with no better success than had Scoland. Her great-hearted protector was gone.

Rumor had coupled her name with that of the hero of the hour, the discoverer of the pole,* and with the foreecho of wedding

* The South Pole was actually discovered by Roald Amundsen in 1911, a fact which the editors feel it is necessary to mention in deference to the great explorer. The discrepancy need not detract from the value of the great fantasy of the snow-country.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bells. Several times the subject was mentioned to her by the captain himself. He found the girl strangely silent on the matter that, before their trip to the south he had considered was almost settled. She did not speed his wooing, and he was too busy a man for the time to try and regain his lost advantage.

Dinners, receptions, fetes, and the lecture platform made continual demands on him, and then the summons came to go to Washington and lay the proofs of his polar discovery before the savants of the National Geographic Society.

Nearly a month had worn away since the Felix docked when Scoland journeyed to the Capital to place in the hands of the gray and critical members of the society the data of his explorations, that should fix him for all time in the firmament of famous discoverers—first man to stand at the southern pole.

MORE than two hours after he left the side of the Felix, Polaris propelled his little craft into an angle at the side of a long, low building that lay close to the harbor shore. He reached up, and his fingers hooked over a stone edge. Softly he drew himself up and over. He stood for the first time on the soil of his fathers' country.

With many a close escape from the wheels of ferries and the noses of propellers of other craft, of which a bewildering number were moving, even at that hour, but without being seen of any man, he had made the passage of the harbor. It was no mean accomplishment of itself. He was both weary and hungry after the toil. The second need must wait for a while. He saw near him the shrubbery of a little park. He crawled into the bushes and fell asleep.

Some three hours later, the dawn light shone revealingly on the soles of his bare feet, thrust from under the bush. They caught the eye of a policeman who was good-naturedly clearing the park of its "boarders." He investigated. The appearance of the man who owned the feet was so different from that of the ordinary "vag" habitués of the park, that the bluecoat decided he must "run him in."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Still sleepy and only half understanding, Polaris went meekly with the policeman. He knew that he was in the hands of a representative of the law of America, a law that his father had taught him must be reverenced and obeyed in all its manifestations.

With every instant unfolding to him a new wonder—from the startling height of a many-storied skyscraper to a belated messenger boy puffing at a cigarette—he was haled to a nearby station-house.

Because he could not, or would not, explain how he came to be in the park, and because his intense interest in the proceedings about him tended to make his answers casual, the judge dismissed him with a curt. "Ten or thirty." The son of the snows went to jail and knew no help for it.

He grew restive with the passing of the days in confinement. He had left but one object in life, and that was the delivery of his father's message. He had guessed for a long time that it had to do with a quest similar to that of Scoland. Now the name of the captain was on every lip. He had gone to Washington, to receive the official recognition of his discovery.

In Washington, Polaris would also liked to have been. And his message? He had given it into the keeping of Rose Emer. Where was she? Would she keep faith?

Then it struck him with the suddenness of a blow that his message might, even now, be in the keeping of the captain, the man who was to be her husband. When he was on the verge of delirium, he had put his most sacred trust into the hands of his enemy!

He laughed at the irony of it. Still, he would go to Washington. The rest was on the knees of the gods. She would keep faith. he knew, but did it rest with her?

Polaris learned much in those thirty days, for there is excellent wisdom even in the bowels of a jail. Came at last the day of his release, and found him in the middle of a puzzle. Not in all America was there a person to whom he could turn in his extremity. He was friendless and penniless. Under the circumstances, he could not bring himself to ask aid of Rose Emer, even if he knew where she was to be found.

Then it was that his dead friend Kalin raised up friends for him, friends and the power to carry out his project.

On the day of his release he was directed to the window of the property clerk's cage in the office of the prison. He found a small, dark-browned man talking with the clerk at the window, who eyed him curiously through thick, tortoise-rimmed spectacles of exaggerated size, that were perched on his high, curved nose.

"My necklace?" said Polaris, as he stood at the window of the cage.

For a moment the clerk hesitated, and he and the little man stared at Polaris. Up and down the little man's eyes roved, and finally a friendly gleam came into them.

"I have come down here to see you about that necklace," he said. "Mr. Atkins, here, he has seen nothing like that necklace of yours. So he has shown it to a friend of his who is one of my employees, and that friend has told to me so much about it that I have come all the way here once just to see it. and then again to see you."

He paused and looked steadily at Polaris, who returned the gaze with interest. What could the man want? Ah, he had it! Money! He would give money for the necklace of Kalin; and money in this land would do anything. It would take him to Washington. He could go as other men went. His face brightened.

"YOUR necklace," pursued the little man, "would you consider selling some of the stones? They are fine rubies, my friend, as no doubt you know. Now tell me, and I read it in your eyes that you cannot lie, are the stones yours? Would there be any legal question as to their ownership?"

"The necklace is mine," said Polaris gravely. "It was the gift of a friend of mine who died, in a foreign land. Do you wish to buy it? I will sell—"

The little man smiled and answered quickly:

"No, not even I wish to purchase the entire necklace. I should have to float a loan to pay its value. But I would like to purchase three or four of the stones."

The end of it was that Polaris parted with three of the smaller stones of the necklace at a price of seventeen thousand dollars—and glad enough the jeweler was to get them at that figure. By a miracle Polaris had fallen into the hands of a man who could help him. He was one of the most noted experts in gems in the metropolis—and honest. Where another might have robbed him easily, this man gave him good value for the stones.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So it was that while the members of the geographic society were poring over the notes and records of Scoland, and plying the captain with many an admiring question, a young man broke in upon the deliberations.

"Never mind the name," he said to the clerk in the anteroom. "I came from the south with the Captain Scoland. They will wish to hear me."

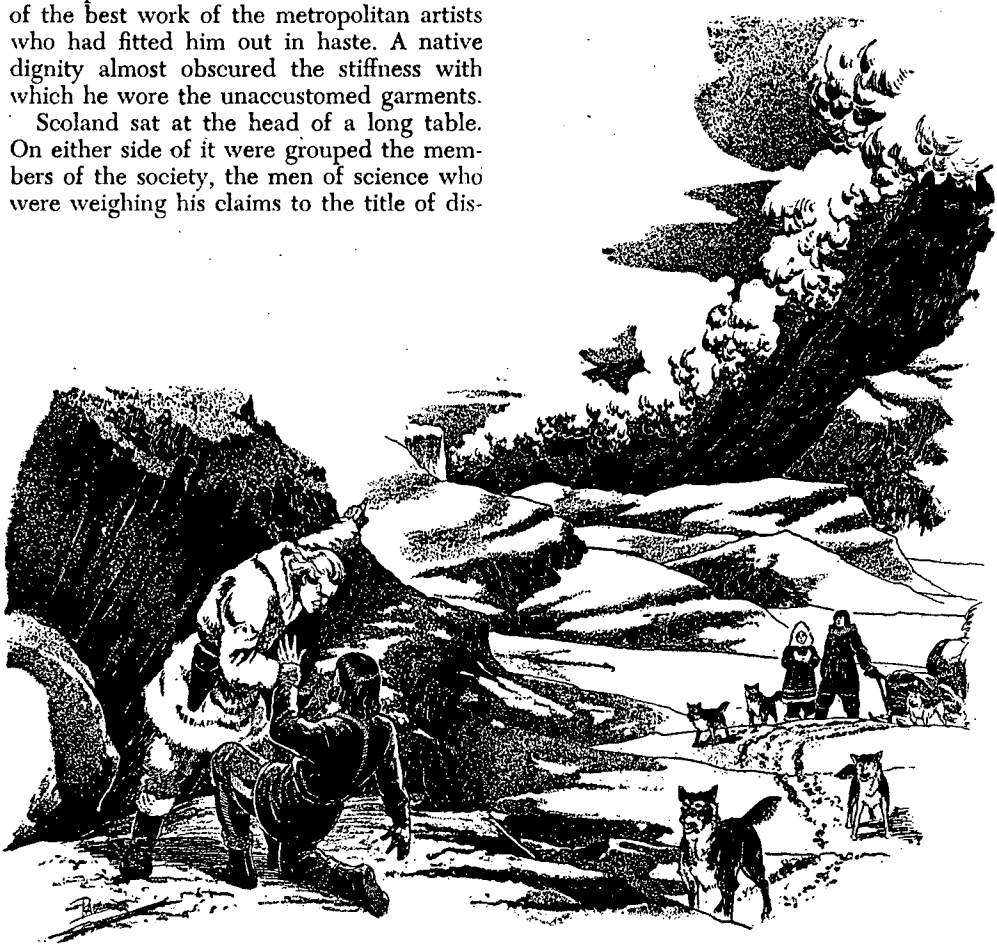
That sufficed, and he entered the council room of the society. He was an exceedingly personable young man, he who thus strode into the den of the savants. He stood a good six feet from his soles, but he was so generously constructed as to shoulders and chest that he did not seem tall.

June had come, and he wore a handsome light textured suit. From the top of his flaxen poll to his shoes, he bore evidences of the best work of the metropolitan artists who had fitted him out in haste. A native dignity almost obscured the stiffness with which he wore the unaccustomed garments.

Scoland sat at the head of a long table. On either side of it were grouped the members of the society, the men of science who were weighing his claims to the title of discoverer of the south pole. As the young man entered the room the captain looked up quickly.

Their eyes met. For an instant the brow of the captain was wrinkled, as though he strove to recall a half-forgotten face. Then the interest in the eyes faded, and he turned them back toward the table. The metamorphosis was too complete for his recognition.

Testy old President Dean turned his leaping blue eyes on the stranger. At the foot of the table a little bowed old man with a puckered face and snapping bright black eyes leaned forward in sudden excitement and gripped the edge of the table until his gaunt knuckles whitened.



Prince Minos of Sardanes knelt humbly before Polaris. "Go back to your people," Polaris told him, "and seek not to follow us"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, young man, who are you, and what do you want here?" rapped out the president.

"My name is Polaris, which, so far as I know, is all of it," replied the young man, and instantly the odd name he gave himself and the quaintness of his speech had drawn him the interest of every man at the table.

"That which I want here, it may be more difficult for me to tell you," he continued. "I came here from the far south in the ship of that man"—he pointed to Scoland—"bringing a message to the world from a man now dead, the man whom I believe first stood at the place of the southern pole. He—"

Polaris got no further. Scoland sprang to his feet in white rage.

"What's this?" he shouted. "Some crazy man has wandered in here. I never laid eyes on him before. Have him put out!"

FOR an instant there was silence in the room. At the foot of the table old Zenas Wright, who had put some marks on the maps in his own day, stared and stared.

"Steve, Steve, I thought you had come back to me," he murmured. "But you were a larger man, Steve, and that was years ago—years ago."

"Yes, you have laid eyes on me before," said Polaris, addressing Scoland. "A sick man came to your camp through the snows, bringing a member of your party who was lost. You took him to the ship, and your Dr. Clawson nursed him. You brought him to America. You thought him crazy and—But that matters not. I am that sick man, the man who disappeared. Any of your men will remember, or Dr. Clawson."

Scoland sank back into his chair with a troubled face. President Dean turned to him and said rather acidly: "You told us nothing of the finding of a strange man in the polar regions. Is the story of this man true?"

Quickly the captain thought. It was true what this man said. Any member of his crew would remember the "wild man." It would profit him not at all to lie.

"Why, yes," he assented. "There was such a man. But he could not, or pretended that he could not, speak English. He appeared to be a savage and an imbecile to boot. We brought him back with us. He disappeared the night we reached quarantine. Now that I look at this man, it seems that he may be the same, although he is changed greatly. He is undoubtedly crazy."

Scoland spoke confidently. Still, he felt in his heart a return of the forebodings that had warned him against this man since first he had set eyes upon him.

"Who are you, lad, and how did you come to be in the south?" old Zenas Wright spoke up from the foot of the table. His tone was kindly, and there was no suspicion, only deep interest, in the keen eyes he turned on the youth.

"As best I may, I will answer those questions," said Polaris. "I was born in the white south. My mother I never saw—only a grave with the name Anne above it. My father sleeps beside that grave, and above him is the name Stephen."

Zenas Wright started visibly and seemed about to interrupt the tale, but did not, and Polaris continued:

"Other names than those I know not that they had. My father reared me, and I never saw another human being until I met those of the party of Captain Scoland. My father died. He gave me a message to bring to the north—a message addressed to the National Geographic Society of the United States. In that message, he told me, was the story of a great discovery he had made—that would ring around the world—and in it also was the history of myself, which he never told me. We lived far to the south for many years, for my father hurt himself in a fall and could not travel.

"When he died and I came north, I passed and burned the ship in which he went to the south. Its name was the Yedda.

"This man has reached the pole. I do not wish to make his glory dim, but—he is not the first to stand at the pole. I have come here—"

He hesitated and glanced around the circuit of the big table. Every man there was leaning forward in strained attention.

"The message—the message your father sent?" queried President Dean, and held out a shaking hand. "Give us that message."

"I have lost that message," said Polaris quietly.

Scoland burst into a peal of derisive laughter. "A joke, gentlemen—a joke!" he cried. "I don't know who and what this young man is, but he has a rare sense of humor."

"Young man," continued the president severely, "this is a strange tale you have told—an almost unbelievable tale. Yet this society has listened to many strange tales. All that is lacking to make history of the strangest of tales is proof. You say you have

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lost your message. Without proof, no claim can stand before this society. I advise you most strongly to find that message, if such a message you have, and bring it before us. Until you do, the society cannot listen to you further."

He inclined his head and beckoned to the clerk at the door to show Polaris from the room. Polaris heistated. There apparently was nothing more to be said. Still he hesitated. Then he heard two sounds behind him that caused him to turn like lightning. They were a quick little gasp and an astounded whine.

Framed in the doorway stood a girl and a great gray dog!

CHAPTER XXIII

A MESSAGE AND THE END

"ROSE EMER!"

With his whole heart in those two spoken words, Polaris made as if he would spring forward. But masking the heart is the mind, and the mind of Polaris held him still. So he stood, with his bosom swelling until it seemed that it must burst the unwonted garments which confined it.

One faithful soul was there whom conventions and the chill doubts that beset human hearts and brains did not restrain. With one leap Marcus crossed the space between the threshold and Polaris. He reared, and when his paws rested on the shoulders of the man, the eyes of the dog and man met.

One searching look gave Marcus, and whined; and it seemed as though his steadfast heart would break for joy. He dropped to all fours again. With every muscle in his splendid body aquiver, he backed against the man's legs and began to pivot around him slowly, baying the while to the full extent of his powerful lungs.

So Marcus told the world that he had found his master.

"Polaris! Found at last!" More slow, but no less joyfully than did Marcus, Rose Emer crossed from the doorway with extended hands. As she walked she limped ever so slightly; noting which, Polaris's lips were contracted with the pang of memory.

"Not yet," she said, when he would have spoken. She whirled from him to the scientists at the table. Every eye was on her.

"Gentleman," she began breathlessly, "you would not give this man a hearing because he is unknown to you, because he tells a strange story, and because he brought you no proof. I am Rose Emer, of whom you know. I wish to speak to you for a few moments. It is of this man's story that I wish to speak. Perhaps you shall have proof of the strangest that he has told. Certainly I shall tell you of stranger. Will you hear me?"

As she paused, President Dean, who was born a Virginian, was at her elbow with a chair. She took it, and sat facing the table. Polaris she motioned to come and stand by her, and he took his stand by her chair, with one hand resting upon its back and the other on the head of Marcus.

"We will listen with pleasure to what Miss Emer has to say," said President Dean, and resumed his seat.

"There are certain passages in the expedition to discover the pole which had not been told," she began. There was an almost imperceptible shifting of seats as the men at

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the table leaned forward to catch every word from the lips of the speaker. Scoland shot her a quick glance and then sat sullenly picking at a blotter that lay before him.

"There were certain happenings that have a mighty import for the world," she continued, "which have not been even so much as hinted at. They are in the keeping of this man here and myself. At his request I kept silent; now is the time to speak.

"Gentlemen, this man is neither poor nor without friends. All that I have is his. He saved my life down there in the ice and snow and horror—saved it and kept it, risking his own like a trifle a hundred times over. No, I *will* tell it all," as Polaris put forth a hand to restrain her.

With a dull red flush burning up in his cheeks, he folded his arms and gazed steadily through the windows as the girl went on, telling the spellbound assembly the amazing story.

When she had finished she looked narrowly at Captain Scoland, and said:

"I think that he was wise to decide to keep these things a secret until now. All of these things are true, and I, Rose Emer, witness for them. Now as to the other matter—the discoveries by this man's father and the message he sent to the north—here is that message."

From the bosom of her dress she drew an envelope-shaped packet sewn in membrane. She handed it to President Dean. Through the transparent skin that covered it, he saw on the yellowed paper that it was addressed to the National Geographic Society, and to "Zenas Wright, if he still be a member."

For a moment he turned it over in his hands. Then he passed it to Wright.

"Open it, old friend, and read," he said.

And this is what Zenas Wright read:

"Most of the contents of this packet are proofs, to be laid at the disposal of the society; for I have found the pole, Zenas. I have stood where no other man has ever stood. But that's in the proofs, Zenas—and you shall see them, if Polaris wins through with them. If not—why, then, one more vain dream.

"This is my son, Polaris, Zenas, who brings my message to the world. You remember I always wanted to do big things. Well, I decided to find the pole. I would go alone, and the glory of achievement would be mine alone. Now I am dying here in the snows, and the only human face I've seen for years is that of my son.

"Briefly, I took enough money from my estates to serve my purposes and went atraveling. Then I disappeared. I bought a ship, the Yedda, in Japan. I had her fitted out in Nagasaki and Hong Kong. Then I went to Australia. We sailed from there.

"Alas I met *her* before we sailed. I was mad. We eloped, and God forgive me, I took her with me. She was the daughter of a wealthy trader in Sydney, Horace Kering.

"We sailed into the snows. We camped, and I pushed through with dogs. I was gone months. I found the pole. I returned. They had deserted. The scoundrels had gone and left her; only the old cook was faithful. I never heard of them again, and often I hoped that they were lost.

"The child was born. She lived but a few short months. Then she went, too. The cook also, he's dead these many years. The boy lived.

"We would have come north together, but then I fell and hurt my leg. I will never travel. The boy, he's taken care of both of us for years. He knows not his own name, except that I call him Polaris. I've educated him. For years I've trained his mind. The life has trained his body. He's stronger than I ever was, and I was no weakling.

"When I go, he'll go to the north. That won't be long, now. My God, I've been here twenty-four years! What must have happened out in the world! But, Zenas, I'll not whine. Old comrade, if the boy comes, be good to him. He's a good lad. There's enough left of the old estate in California to make him rich, if it's been cared for. I've left him no letter, but tell him that his old father loved him well.

"Good-by, Zenas. "Stephen Janess."

Old Zenas Wright stopped reading and for a moment covered his eyes with his wrinkled hands. Then he raised his head. He fumbled with the papers.

"Here, the rest of them are observations and data," he said, and handed them back to President Dean. Members of the society elbowed each other to get a look at them. Under cover of the bustle, Polaris Janess clasped the hand of Rose Emer.

"Ah, lady," he whispered, "Polaris has a name at last—a name, and he is an American gentleman, and—" He broke off suddenly and crossed to the captain.

Scoland sat like a man in a dream.

"Yonder proofs there will show to the world my father's work. No lies have been told or written, Captain Scoland," said Polaris, speaking low. "You, too, have stood at the great pole. Your glory is just as great. You are a brave man. My father would not wish to rob you of that glory. I do not wish to stain the brightness of your achievement. What has passed between us is forgotten. You were blinded for a while. I remember naught but the kindness of your Dr. Clawson. Let us both be silent about the treatment of the 'wild man.'"

He held out his hand.

For the barest fraction of a second Scoland hesitated. He was not an entirely bad man. He was a very brave one. He gripped the hand of the son of the snows.

"And now," he said with an effort, "she's

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

waiting; go to her." He pointed to Rose Emer.

Around the end of the table came marching Zenas Wright, his old eyes shining. He came upon a tableau—a girl and a man and a dog, all wordless, all eyes.

"H-m-m-m, Zenas, you're an old fool!" he muttered. "They have no eyes for you just now." He turned to stump back to the table, but thought better of it and came back.

"Lad," he said, "we—the members of this society—wish to examine the records of your father's discoveries. We may want to ask you some questions. Will you wait, you and the young woman—in here?"

HE MARCHED them to a small, empty room at the side, and almost thrust them into it. Marcus edged in with them. The door was shut. They were alone.

Both of them stared out of the window. Minutes passed. Then:

"Lady, how did you find me?"

"One cannot sell three great rubies at the door of a jail, sir, and go quite unnoticed," she answered, flushing. "My agents were on the watch. They investigated, and I came on from Boston."

Still she did not look at him. Polaris came a little nearer.

"Why did you tell them all—"

"That you are a hero!" she flashed hotly. "I want all the world to know it!" She faced him at last.

"And—but—the captain?"

She looked at him.

In a second his arms were around her. For the second time their lips met. Time flew by unheeded. Marcus looked at them in wonder, and then curled calmly on a rug and stretched his nose.

Finally:

"But I am only a poor, half-savage—"

"Hush! I love you!"

Presently they heard through the closed door the muffled sound of shouting. It was the members of the society cheering Stephen Janess.

This is the first of a group of three famous "Polaris" stories. The next of the trilogy is "Minos of Sardanes."

CHILLS, THRILLS, SUPERNATURAL MYSTERY!

Coming in the August issue:

CREEP, SHADOW!

By A. Merritt

Modern science fights the power of ancient and evil sorcery!

A powerful novel by one of fantasy's greatest writers

Also two fine short stories

On sale June 17th

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Serapion

By Francis Stevens

Author of "Claimed", "The Citadel of Fear", etc.

"An evil influence has been brought into touch with you," the medium warned Clayton Barbour. "A dead soul seeks to destroy your life that it may itself go on living." At that moment Barbour began his grim struggle for possession of himself

IT BEGAN because, meeting Nils Berquist in town one August morning, he dragged me off for luncheon at a little restaurant on a side street where he swore I should meet some of the rising geniuses of the century.

What we did meet was the commencement for me of such an extraordinary experience as befalls few men. At the time, however, the whole affair seemed incidental, with a spice of grotesque but harmless absurdity. Jimmy Moore and his Alicia! How could anyone, meeting them as I did, have believed a grimness behind their amusing eccentricity?

I was just turned twenty-four that August day. A boy's guileless enthusiasm for the untried was still strong in me, coupled with a tendency to make friends in all quarters, desirable or otherwise. Almost anyone who liked me, I liked. My college years, very recently ended, had seen me sworn comrade to a reckless and on-his-way-to-be-notorious son of plutocracy, while I was also well received in the room which Nils Berquist shared with two other embryo socialists of fanatic dye. A certain ingenuous likableness must have been mine even then, I think, to have gained me not only toleration, but real friendship in both camps.

Berquist was older than I by several years. He had earned his college days before enjoying them and, college ended, he dropped back into the struggle for existence and out of my sight—till I ran across him in town that August day.

To play host even at a very moderate luncheon must have been an extravagance for Nils, though I didn't think of that. He was a man with whom one somehow never associated the idea of need. Tall, lean, with a dark, long face, high cheek-bones and deep eyes set well apart, he dressed badly and walked the world in a careless air of ownership that mere clothes could not in the least affect.

His intimates knew him capable of vast, sudden enthusiasms, and equally vast depressions of the spirit. But up or down, he was Nils Berquist, sufficient unto himself, asking no favors, and always with an indefinable air of being well able to grant them.

I admired and liked him, was very glad to see him again, and cheerfully let him steer me around two corners and in the door of his bragged-of trysting place.

On first entering, my friend cast an eye about the aggregation of more or less shabby individuals present and muttered: "Not a soul here!" in a disappointed tone. Then, glimpsing a couple seated at a corner table laid for four, he brightened a trifle and led me over to them.

Nils's idea of formal presentation was always more brief than elaborate. After addressing the fair-haired, light-eyelashed, Palm-Beach-suited person on one side of the table as "Jimmy" and his *vis-à-vis*, a darkly mysterious lady in a purple veil, as "Alicia," he referred to me casually as "Clay," and considered the introduction complete.

Copyright 1920 *by The Frank A. Munsey Company*

This story appeared serially beginning in the June 19, 1920 issue of *The Argosy*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED